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My Little Lady

MY LITTLE LADY.

VOL. III.

MY LITTLE LADY.

Thy sinless progress, through a world
By sorrow darken'd and by care disturb'd,
Apt likeness bears to hers through gather'd clouds
Moving untouch'd in silver purity.

WORDSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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MY LITTLE LADY.

PART II.

(CONTINUED.)

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CHAPTER XIV.

MADELON'S CONVALESCENCE.

MADELON, if she had but known it, had small reason to apprehend any very vigorous pursuit on the part of the nuns. There was, it is true, no small commotion in the convent, when Sœur Lucie, entering Madelon's cell the morning after her flight, found the empty room, the unslept-on bed. She did not indeed realize at first that the child had run away; but when, after inquiry and search through the whole convent, she found that nothing had been seen or heard of her, since she herself had quitted the cell the previous

evening, then the whole truth became apparent, and a general sense of consternation pervaded the sisterhood. It was the enormity of the offence that struck them aghast, the boldness of the attempt, and its complete success. It was altogether a new idea to them that anyone should wish to escape from those walls; an appalling one that any one should make such an attempt, and succeed. Sœur Lucie, held responsible for Madelon, was summoned before the Superior, questioned, cross-questioned, and, amid tears and sobs, could only repeat that she had left her charge as usual, the evening before; and that, in the morning, going to her cell, had discovered that she had vanished; how, or when, or whither, she could not imagine. How she had escaped was indeed at first a mystery, which could not fail to rouse an eager curiosity in the sisters, and a not unpleasing excitement succeeded the

first indignation, as, with one accord, they ran to examine Madelon's room. The window stood wide-open, the branches of the climbing rose-trees were broken here and there, small footsteps could be traced on the flower-bed below. It was all that was needed to make their supposition a certainty—Madelon had run away.

This point settled, a calmer feeling began to prevail, and, as their first consternation subsided, the nuns began to reflect that after all worse things might have happened. If it had been one of themselves indeed, that would have been a very different matter; such a sin, such a scandal could not even be thought of without horror. But this little stray girl, who belonged to nobody, whom nobody had cared for, who had been a trouble ever since she had come, and who had been left a burthen and a responsibility on their hands—why should they concern

themselves so much about her flight? No doubt she had made her escape to some friends she had known before she was brought to the convent, from no one knew where, two or three years ago. The nuns were not more averse than other people to the drawing of convenient conclusions from insufficient premises, and this theory of Madelon's having run away to her friends once started, everyone was ready to add their mite of evidence in aid of its confirmation. Some thought she had possibly started for England—it was an Englishman who had brought her to the convent; others that she had friends in Paris—it certainly was from Paris she had come; one suggested one thing, and one another, and in the meantime, though inquiries were made, the search was neither very energetic nor very determined. When the evening came, it was generally felt to be rather a relief than

otherwise that nothing had been heard of the small runaway. What could they do with her if she came back? No one felt disposed to put in a claim for her—least of all Sœur Lucie, whom she had brought into terrible disgrace, and who had yet been really fond of the child, and who for months after had a pang in her kind little heart whenever she thought of her wayward charge. And so, when, two days later, a letter, with neither date nor signature, but bearing a Paris post-mark, arrived for the Superior, announcing that Mademoiselle Madeleine Linders was with friends, and that it was useless for any one to attempt to find her or reclaim her, for they had her in safe keeping, and would never consent to part with her, every one felt that the matter was arranged in the most satisfactory manner possible, and troubled themselves no more.

As for the Countess G——, there had

been a flatness about the termination of her share in Madelon's adventures that effectually put a stop to any desire on her part to pursue the matter further; and finding, on her arrival at Liége, that her husband was obliged to start for Brussels that very afternoon, she found it convenient altogether to dismiss the subject from her mind. With her departure from Liége, we also gladly dismiss her from these pages for ever.

So, Madelon, tossing and moaning on her bed of sickness, is once more all alone in the world, except for Jeanne-Marie, to whom, before two days were over, she had somehow become the one absorbing interest in life. The lonely woman, whose sympathies and affections had, as one might guess, been all bruised, and warped, and crushed in some desperate struggle, or in some long agony, found a new channel for them in an indescribable, yearning love for the little

pale girl whom she had rescued, and by whose side she sat hour after hour, wondering, as she listened to her wild broken talk about her father and Monsieur Horace, Aunt Thérèse, and Sœur Lucie, what the child's past life could have been, and by what strange chances she had come to be in such evil straits. A new world of hopes and fears, of interests and anxieties, seemed to have suddenly opened for Jeanne-Marie, as she sat in the little upper chamber; whilst in the public room downstairs, the rough men, in obedience to her word, sat silently drinking and smoking, or talking in subdued voices, so that no disturbing sound might reach the sick child above.

Madelon's second attack of fever was far worse than the first. Weakened as she was by her former illness, it was an almost hopeless fight with death that was carried on for days; and when the crisis came at

last, the doctor himself declared that it was scarcely possible that she should rally, and be restored to life and reason. But the crisis passed, and Madelon was once more safe. She awoke about midnight to the confused consciousness of a strange room, perplexing her with unfamiliar surroundings. A dim light burned before the coloured picture of a saint that hung on the rough white-washed wall, and by its uncertain gleam she could distinguish the rude furniture, the patch-work quilt, the heavy rafters that crossed above her head. The window stood wide open, letting in the night scents of the flowers in the garden below; she could see a space of dark, star-lit sky, and hear the rustling of the trees, the whispering of the breeze among the vine-leaves that clustered about the window. Her eyes wandered round with vague bewilderment, the flickering light and long shadows only

seeming to confuse her more, as she tried to reconcile her broken, shadowy memories with the present realities, which seemed more dream-like still.

The door opened, and Jeanne-Marie came in, holding another candle, which she shaded with her hand, as she stood by the bed for a moment, looking down upon Madelon.

"You are better," she said at last, setting down the candle on the table behind her, and smoothing the pillow and coverlet. Her voice was like her face, harsh and melancholy, but with a tender, pathetic ring in it at times.

"Am I?" said Madelon. "Have I been ill again? Where is Sœur Lucie? This is not the convent—where am I?"

"You are not at the convent now," answered Jeanne-Marie. "I am taking care of you, and you must lie very still, and go to sleep again when you have taken this."

Madelon drank off her medicine, but she was not satisfied, and in a moment her brain was at work again.

"I can't make out where I am," she said, looking up at Jeanne-Marie with the old wistful look in her eyes—"is it an hotel? —is papa coming? I thought I was at the convent with Aunt Thérèse. Ah! do help me!"

"I will tell you nothing unless you lie still," said Jeanne-Marie, as Madelon made a most futile attempt to raise herself in bed. She considered a moment, and then said—"Don't you remember, *ma petite?* Your papa is dead, and you are not at the convent any more, and need not go back there unless you like. You are with me, Jeanne-Marie, at Le Trooz, and I will take care of you till you are well. Now you are not to talk any more."

Madelon lay silent for a minute. "Yes,"

I remember," she said at last slowly. "Papa is dead, and Monsieur Horace—he is not here?" she cried, with startling eagerness.

"No, no," said Jeanne-Marie, "no one is here but me."

"Because you know," Madelon went on, "I cannot see him yet—I cannot—it would not do to see him, you know, till—till—ah! you do not know about that——" She stopped suddenly, and Jeanne-Marie smoothed the pillow again with her rough, kindly hands.

"I know that you must go to sleep now, and that I shall not say a word more to you to-night," she said; and then, without heeding Madelon's further questions, she put out the light, and sat silently by the bedside till the child was once more asleep.

Madelon did not recover readily from this second attack. Even when she was pro-

nounced wholly out of danger, there were the weariest days to be passed, relapses, weakness, languor. Flowers bloomed and faded in the garden below, the scent of the roses perfumed the air, the red-tipped vine-shoots growing upwards narrowed the space of blue sky seen through the little window, till the sun shone in softened by a screen of glowing green leaves; and all through these lengthening summer days our pale little Madelon lay on her sick bed, very still, and patient, and uncomplaining, and so gentle and grateful to Jeanne-Marie, who nursed and watched her unceasingly with her harsh tenderness, that a passionate affection seized the hard, lonely woman, for the forlorn little stranger who was so dependent upon her, and who owed everything to her compassion and care.

It was not long before a recollection of the past came back to Madelon, sufficiently

clear, until the moment of her jumping out of the train at Le Trooz; after that she could remember nothing distinctly, only a general sense of misery, and pain, and terror. She asked Jeanne-Marie numberless questions, as to how and where she had found her, and what she had said.

"How did you know that I had run away from the convent?" she asked.

"You said so," answered Jeanne-Marie. "You were afraid that your aunt would come and take you back."

"Aunt Thérèse is dead," said Madelon. "I remember it all very well now. Did I tell you that? And did I tell you about papa too? How strange that I should not remember having said so many things;" she added, as the woman replied in the affirmative.

"Not at all strange," replied Jeanne-Marie. "People often talk like that when

ill, and recollect nothing of it afterwards."

"Still, it is very odd," said Madelon, musing; and then she added suddenly, "Did I talk of any one else?"

"Of plenty of people," replied Jeanne-Marie. "Sœur Lucie, and Sœur Françoise, and numbers of others."

"Ah! yes; but I don't mean in the convent!—anyone out of the convent, I mean? Did I talk of—of Monsieur Horace?"

"Sometimes," said Jeanne-Marie, counting her stitches composedly.

"What did I say about him?" asked Madelon, anxiously. "Please will you tell me? I can't remember, you know."

Jeanne-Marie looked at her for a moment, and then said, rather bluntly,

"Nothing that anybody could understand. You called to him, and then you told him not to come; that was all, and not common-sense either."

"Ah, that is all right," said Madelon satisfied; her secret at least was safe, and never, never, should it be revealed till she had accomplished her task. As she once more mentally recorded this little vow, she looked at Jeanne-Marie, who was still sitting by her bedside knitting.

"Jeanne-Marie," she said in her tired, feeble little voice, and putting out one of her small thin hands, "you are very, very, good to me; I can't think how anyone can be so kind as you are; I shall love you all my life. What would have become of me if you had not found me and taken such care of me?"

"What will become of you if you don't leave off talking, and do as the doctor bids you?" said Jeanne-Marie, stopping her little speech; "he said you were to be quite quiet, and here have you been chattering

this half-hour; now I am going to get your dinner."

As she became stronger, Madelon would sometimes have long conversations with Jeanne-Marie—in which she would tell her much about her past life, of her father, of how happy she had been as a little child, of how miserable she had been in the convent, and of how she had hated the life there. But more often she would lie still for hours, almost perfectly silent, thinking, brooding over something—Jeanne-Marie would wonder what. Madelon never told her; she had begun to love and cling to the woman, almost the only friend she had in the world, but not even in her would she confide; she had made the resolution to tell no one of her plans and hopes, to trust no one, lest her purpose should in any way be frustrated; and she kept to it, though at the cost of

some pain and trouble, so natural is it to seek for help and sympathy.

Madelon's fixed idea had returned to her with redoubled force since her illness. Her one failure had only added intensity to her purpose since her first sense of discouragement had passed away; there was something in the child's nature that refused to acknowledge defeat as such, and she was only eager to begin again. Our poor little Madelon, with her strange experiences and inexperiences, her untutored faiths and instincts, shaking off all rule, ignorant of all conventionalities, only bent, amidst difficulties, and obstacles, and delays, on steadily working towards one fixed and well-defined end—surely, tried by any of the received laws of polite society, concerning correct, well-educated young ladies of thirteen, she would be found sadly wanting. Shall we blame her? or shall we not rather, with a

kindly compassion, try for a while to understand from what point of view she had learnt to look at life, and to arrive at some comprehension of, and sympathy with her.

In the meantime, though it was evident she could do nothing till she was well again, an old perplexity was beginning to trouble Madelon; what was she to do without money? Once, a strange chance—which, with a touch of convent superstition that had been grafted on her mind, she was half disposed to look upon as miraculous—had provided the requisite sum, but the most sanguine hopes could hardly point to the repetition of such a miracle or chance, and during long hours, when Jeanne-Marie was attending to her customers below, or sitting at her side, knitting, Madelon's brain was for ever working on this old problem that had proved so hard before, when she sat thinking it out in the convent cell. But at any

rate she was free here; she might come and go without scaling walls, or fear of pursuing nuns; and then could she not earn some money? The thought was as an inspiration to Madelon—yes, when she was strong and well enough, she would work day and night till she had gained it. If she were only well.

It was about this time that Jeanne-Marie perceived a change in her patient, hitherto so still and resigned, a certain uneasy restlessness and longing to be up and about again.

"Jeanne-Marie, do you think I shall soon be well?" she would ask again and again; "do you think the doctor will soon let me get up?"

"You will never be well if you toss about like that," Jeanne-Marie said grimly one evening; "lie still and I will tell you some stories."

She sat down by her, and, as she knitted, told her one story after another, fairy-tales for the most part, old stories that Madelon knew by heart from her early studies in the German picture-books and similar works. But Jeanne-Marie told them well, and somehow they seemed invested with a new interest for Madelon, as she half unconsciously contrasted her own experiences with those of the heroes and heroines, and found in their adventures some far-fetched parallel to her own. But then their experiences were so much wider and more varied in that old charmed, sunny, fairy life; the knot of their difficulties was so readily cut, by a simple reference to some Fortunatus' purse, or the arrival in the very nick of time of some friendly fairy. Madelon did not draw the parallel quite far enough, or it might have occurred to her that benevolence did not become wholly extinct with the disap-

pearance of fairies, and that friendly interference is not quite unknown even in these more prosaic days. The Fortunatus' purse, it is true, might awake a sense of comparison, but who could have looked at Jeanne-Marie's homely features, and have dreamed of her in connexion with a fairy? In truth, it requires a larger and deeper experience than any that Madelon could have acquired, or reasoned out, to recognise how much of the charm of these tales of our childhood can be traced to the eternal truths that lie hidden in them, or to perceive that the shining fairy concealed beneath the frequent guise of some crabbed old woman, is no mere freak of fancy, but the symbol of a reality, less exceptional perhaps amongst us poor mortals, than amongst the fairies themselves, who, finding their presence no longer needed, vanished from our earth ever so many centuries ago.

It was the next morning, that, after the doctor's visit was over, Jeanne-Marie returned to the bedroom, with the air of having tidings to impart.

"You will be satisfied now, I hope," she said, as she met the gaze of the restless brown eyes. "M. le Docteur says you may get up for an hour this afternoon."

"Does he?" cried Madelon, eagerly; "then he thinks I am better—that I shall soon be well."

"Of course you are better," said Jeanne-Marie—"you are getting stronger every day; you will soon be quite well again."

"And how soon shall I be able to go out?—to go on a journey, for instance?"

"You are, then, very anxious to get away?" asked Jeanne-Marie.

"But yes," said Madelon naïvely, "I must go as soon as possible."

"Ah, well," said the woman, stifling a

sigh, "that is only natural; but there is no hurry, you will not be able to go yet."

"No," said Madelon sadly, "I shall not be able to go yet."

She did not remark Jeanne-Marie's sad voice, nor the unwonted tears that filled her eyes; the woman felt half heart-broken at what she imagined to be her charge's indifference. Madelon was not indifferent or ungrateful, but her mind was filled just then with her one idea, and she had no room for any other; it wrought in her what seemed a supreme selfishness, and yet she had no thought of self in the matter.

She lay quite still for a few minutes, her pale little face glowing with her renewed hopes. Then she said,

"Jeanne-Marie, would you mind putting out my things where I can see them?—my frock and all. Then I shall believe I am to get up."

Jeanne-Marie acquiesced silently. Madelon's scanty wardrobe had all been mended and put in order, and now it was spread out before her; but somehow the sight of the old black silk frock brought a sudden chill with it; the very last time she had put it on had been on the morning of the day she had escaped from the convent. Since then what had she not gone through! what disappointment, terror, sickness nearly to death! Might she not indeed have been dead by this time, or a prisoner for ever within the convent walls, had it not been for Jeanne-Marie? Her eyes filled with tears at the thought. She longed to tell Jeanne-Marie once more how much she loved her; but the woman had left the room, and Madelon could only lie patiently, and think of all she was going to do, when she should be well again.

CHAPTER XV.

A SUMMER WITH JEANNE-MARIE.

AT the back of Jeanne-Marie's house lay the garden, sheltered by the steep rocky hill that rose just beyond. All through the long summer evenings the voices of the men, as they sat smoking and drinking in its vine-covered arbours, might be heard; but during the day it was comparatively deserted, and Jeanne-Marie had no difficulty in finding a quiet, shady corner where Madelon might sit as long as she pleased without being disturbed. An outside wooden staircase led from her room to the garden

below, so that she could come and go without passing through the lower rooms of the house; and we may be sure that it was considered a golden day by both her and Jeannne-Marie, when she first made this little expedition. The child, still almost too weak to stand or walk, was carried by her strong, kind hostess down the flight of steps, and once more found herself under the blue heavens, with a world of sweet summer sights and sounds around her, as she lay on her little improvised couch amongst the flowers and sweet smelling herbs.

"There," said Jeanne-Marie, contemplating her with much satisfaction, "now you have nothing to do but to get well again as fast as you can."

"Ah, I shall soon be well now!" cried Madelon joyfully. The colour came into her pale cheeks, her eyes shone with a new light. Mists, and rain, and darkness seemed

to have fled from her life, and in their place a full tide of summer sunshine, in which the birds sang gladly, and the flowers seemed to spring up and open unconsciously, was crowning and glorifying the day.

That she had nothing to do but to get well, was not at all Madelon's idea, however. A few evenings later, as she lay awake in her bed, watching Jeanne-Marie moving about in the twilight, arranging things for the night, she said—

"Jeanne-Marie, I want to earn some money."

"Some money, little one! What is that for?"

"Ah, that I cannot tell you; but I want some, very much—thirty francs at least. See here, I have been thinking—I can embroider—Sœur Lucie said I could do it almost as well as she could; do you think you could get me some to do? Ah, please

help me. I should like to earn some money."

Two days afterwards, Jeanne-Marie produced two strips of cloth, such as are used for purposes of church decoration, with patterns and materials for embroidery.

"Is that the sort of thing?" she said. "If you could do these, you would get thirty francs for them, I daresay; I will see that they are disposed of."

"I will try," said Madelon. "Jeanne-Marie, how good you are to me!—whatever I want, you do for me!"

"That is nothing," said the woman, and went abruptly away to attend to her customers.

So, all the long summer days, Madelon sat through hot noontides in the shady garden below, through golden sunsets at the open window of her room above, stitching with silks and gold and silver thread, till her weak

little fingers ached, and the task seemed as if it would never be done. Down in the homely, neglected little garden, all a sweet tangle of flowers and weeds, she would seat herself; the birds would twitter overhead, the bees would come humming round her amongst the unpruned vines and roses that clambered everywhere, while the embroidery pattern slowly grew beneath her fingers. She worked steadily and well, but she could not work very fast; and she wearied, oh! how she wearied of it sometimes; but she never wavered in her purpose. "It is for Monsieur Horace," she would say, and begin again with fresh zeal. Through the open window of the little kitchen, which looked upon the garden, she could see Jeanne-Marie coming and going, chopping herbs, shelling peas and beans; and sometimes, when Madelon was too tired of her work, she would gladly throw it down, that she might help

in these employments. "May I make an omelette, Jeanne-Marie?" she would say; "I know how to do it, if you will let me try." And the sight of Madelon flitting about the kitchen, busy among the pots and pans, seemed to stir some long-forgotten emotion in Jeanne-Marie's sad heart—too long forgotten to be learnt anew without pain, for her eyes would fill with tears as she watched her. The child never went into the village, or, indeed, stirred beyond the garden; that was all the world to her just now, peopled by Jeanne-Marie, her hopes, and her embroidery.

Is it most strange or most natural, one wonders, that there are times when one small nook of earth shuts out, as it were, the whole universe from our eyes, when one personal interest occupies us to the exclusion of the whole world of action, and progress, and speculation, and thought? Thrones

may topple over, nationalities be effaced, revolutions in politics, in religion, in science be effected, and all pass unheeded while we sit counting our own private loss and gain in love or friendship, in grief or joy. Whilst Madelon has been wearying out her little heart and brain in the pursuit of her self-imposed task, the world has not been, and is not, standing still, we may be sure, and her small wheel of life is somehow kept in motion by the great revolving circle of events, however little she may think of, or heed them. Sebastopol has fallen in these last months, the Crimean war is at an end, and all the world that was discussing battles and sieges when Horace Graham last parted with Madelon one September afternoon, is talking of treaties and peace now, as the allied armies move homewards from the East. And—which indeed would have had more interest for Madelon could she have known it—Gra-

ham himself, after more than two years hard work, had been wounded in one of the last skirmishes; and with this wound, and the accompanying fever, had lain for weeks very near to death in the Scutari hospital, to be sent home at last, invalided to England. While Madelon had been slowly recovering from her fever in her little out-of-the-world refuge at Le Trooz, Graham had been gaining health and strength in a pleasant English home, with a sister to nurse and pet him, nephews and nieces to make much of him, and the rosiest cheeks and bluest eyes in the world to fall in love with, as he lay idly on the lawn through the summer days. It was at the house of his sister, who was married to a country doctor in Kent, that this double process of lovemaking and convalescence went on, with the greatest success and satisfaction to all parties; and it was Miss Maria Leslie, the ward of his brother-in-

law, Dr. Vavasour, who was the owner of these bluest eyes and rosiest cheeks.

Meanwhile Madelon, stitching, stitching away at her work, thought vaguely of Monsieur Horace as being still in that far-off country from which he had last written to her, and wondered a little how soon a letter written to the English address he had given her would reach him. What would he say and think when he received it? And when, ah! when would she be able to write it? She worked on steadily, and yet it was already September when the last stitch was put in, and she could give the work to Jeanne-Marie. A few days afterwards, the woman put thirty francs into her hands.

"There is your money," she said; "now what are you going to do with it?"

"I am going away," answered Madelon.

"Yes?" said Jeanne-Marie, without any

apparent emotion, "and where are you going?"

"I am going to Spa. Ah! Jeanne-Marie do not ask me what I am going to do; it is my secret, I cannot tell any one, but you shall know some day."

Jeanne-Marie was silent for a moment, then, "Look here, *ma petite*," she said; "I don't want to know what you are going to do; it is no concern of mine, and I cannot keep you if you want to go away; but who are you going to in Spa? I cannot let you go off without knowing where you are, and whether you are safe. You might have the fever again, or some one might try to take you back to the convent, and I should know nothing about it. Where are you going? Have you any friends at Spa?"

"There is only Madame Bertrand at the Hôtel de Madrid," replied Madelon, rather disconsolately; "I would not mind going to

her again, she is so kind; she wanted me to stay with her the last time I was there—but then there is Mademoiselle Henriette—it was she who wished to send me back to the convent; if she were not there, I should not be afraid."

"And is there no other hotel you could go to?"

"I should not like to go to another," said Madelon, "they would be all strange; I would rather go to Madame Bertrand, and I should not have to stay there long."

"And then what are you going to do?"

"I don't know—I am not sure," answered Madelon, rather embarrassed. "I shall write to a friend I have—Monsieur Horace, you know—and he will tell me what to do."

"And why do you not write to him at once, *mon enfant?*"

"I cannot," was all Madelon's answer,

nor could Jeanne-Marie ever extract any further explanation on that point. The next day Jeanne-Marie was missing from the Restaurant for some hours; but she reappeared in the afternoon, and presently came out into the garden, where Madelon, seated in her favourite corner, was nursing a big cat, and sorting out herbs for drying.

"What a long time you have been away!" she said, as Jeanne-Marie came up to her. "See, I have done all these; I think there are enough to last you all the winter."

"Not quite," answered the woman; "but never mind them now. Do you want to know where I have been? I have been to Spa, and seen Madame Bertrand."

"Have you!" cried Madelon; "did you tell her about me? Was Mademoiselle Henriette there?"

"Mademoiselle Henriette is gone; she and her aunt had a grand quarrel, and she

left, and so Madame Bertrand is alone again. I told her all about you: she said she was glad you had not gone back to the convent, and that you could go to her whenever you wished, for she would take care of you. So as your work is done," Jeanne-Marie added with a sigh, "there is nothing to keep you, and you may go as soon as you like."

"May I?" cried Madelon; "to-morrow, next day? Ah! Jeanne-Marie, how happy you have made me; you will know why, you will understand some day—tell me when I shall go."

"We will say the day after to-morrow. I will get your things ready," answered Jeanne-Marie. She stood gazing at the child for a moment, as if she would have said something more, then turned away quickly and entered the house.

Madelon never thought of connecting

Jeanne-Marie's sad looks and ways with her own departure; and, indeed, hardly noticed them, in her joy at having accomplished her task, and earned the longed-for thirty francs. She did not understand nor suspect the woman's passionate longing for her affection; no child can comprehend that strange, pathetic yearning that older people have for a child's love—a love so pure, and fresh, and ingenuous, that when it is freely and frankly given, it is surely the most flattering and precious in the world. Madelon gave Jeanne-Marie all the love she had to bestow, but the first place in her heart was already taken; and perhaps the woman had discovered that it was so, and was half jealous of this unknown Monsieur Horace, whom she divined to be at the bottom of all Madelon's plans and ideas. But if it were so, she never spoke of it, nor of any of the half-formed hopes and projects she

may have had; and Madelon never could have guessed them, as her kind, sad hostess silently made up her small wardrobe into a bundle, and patched the old black silk frock once more, sighing over it the while. And had Madelon then no regrets at leaving the little cottage, where she had been tended with such motherly care? Some, perhaps; for as she sat that last evening, watching Jeanne-Marie at her work, she, too, sighed a little; and at last, clasping her arms round the woman's neck, she cried—"Jeanne-Marie, I will love you always—always!—I will never forget you!"

"That is as may be," says melancholy Jeanne-Marie, disengaging herself.

"Ah! you will not believe me," said Madelon; "but I tell you I never forget, and you have been so good, so kind to me! Sometimes I think I should like to stay with you always—would you let me?"

"Would I let you?" said Jeanne-Marie, dropping her work suddenly, and looking at the child. "No, I would not let you," she said, after a moment's pause, "unless you had nowhere else to go; but you have other friends, it appears, and it is well for you. No, I would not let you, for it would be as bad a thing for you as could be. Ask any of the neighbours what they would think of it—ask them if they think you would get good or bad from me, and see what they would say!" She gave a little scornful laugh.

"I don't know what you mean," said Madelon, fixing her great eyes on her with a puzzled look—"I don't care what they would say. You are one of the best people I ever knew, and I love you with all my heart; but I *must* go away."

"Why must you?" asks Jeanne-Marie, stitching away at the black frock.

"That is what I cannot tell you," said Madelon. "No, I will not tell anyone, though I should like to tell you, too," added the poor child, gazing wistfully at almost the only friend she had in the world.

"Well, well," said Jeanne-Marie, "I do not want to hear your secrets, as you know, unless you like to tell them; but I am not going to lose sight of you altogether till I hear you are safe with your friends. You must write me a letter from Spa, and if I do not hear or see anything of you in a week's time, I shall come and look after you."

"Yes, I will write," said Madelon; "and I wish—I wish I was not going away; I have been so happy here." And then she hid her face on Jeanne-Marie's shoulder, while the sky was all rosy with the sunset of the last of these peaceful summer days that our Madelon was to spend at Le Trooz.

Jeanne-Marie could not spare time to go again to Spa the next day, but she went with Madelon to the station, and waited till the train that bore her away, was out of sight, and then, all lonely, she walked back to her empty home.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW MADELON KEPT HER PROMISE.

MADELON was standing in a little upper bed-room of the Hôtel de Madrid, a room so high up that from the window one looked over the tops of the trees in the Place Royale below, to the opposite hills. It was already dusk, but there was sufficient light to enable her to count over the little piles of gold that lay on the table before her, and which, as she counted, she put into a small canvas bag. It was the third evening after her arrival in Spa; she was preparing for her third visit to the Redoute, and this was

what her capital of thirty francs had already produced.

The last ten franc-piece disappeared within the bag, and Madelon, taking her hat and cloak, began to put them on slowly, pausing as she did so to reflect.

"If I have the same luck this evening," she thinks, "to-morrow I shall be able to write to Monsieur Horace—if only I have—and why not? I have scarcely lost once these last two nights. Certainly it is better to play in the evening than in the day-time. I remember now that papa once said so, and to-night I feel certain—yes, I feel certain that I shall win—and then to-morrow——"

She clasped her hands in ecstasy; she looked up at the evening sky. It was a raw, grey September evening, with gusts of wind, and showers of rain at intervals. But Madelon cared nothing for the weather; her heart was all glowing with hope, and joy,

and exultation. She put on her hat and veil, took up her money, and locking her door after her, ran downstairs. She hung the key up in Madame Bertrand's room, but Madame Bertrand was not there. On Madelon's arrival at the hotel she had found the excellent old woman ill, and unable to leave her room, and it was in her bed that she had given the child the warmest of welcomes, and from thence that she had issued various orders for her comfort and welfare. Her attack still kept her confined to her room, and thus it happened that our Madelon, quite independent, found herself at liberty to come and go just as she pleased.

She hung up her key, then, in the deserted little parlour, and, unchallenged, left the hotel, and went out into the tree-planted Place, where the band was playing, and people walking up and down under the chill grey skies. She felt very hopeful and joyous,

so different from the first time she had started on this same errand, and the fact inspired her with ever-increasing confidence. She had failed then, and yet here she was, successful in her last attempts, ready to make another crowning trial, and with how many more chances in her favour! Surely she could not fail now!—and yet if she should! She was turning towards the Redoute, when an idea suddenly occurred to her—an idea most natural, arising, as it did, from that instinctive cry for more than human help, that awakes in every heart on great emergencies, and appealing, moreover, to that particular class of religious sentiment which, in our little orphaned, Madelon had most readily responded to convent teaching. What if it had been the Holy Virgin Mother who had been her protector in all these troubles, who had raised her up friends, and had brought her from death, as it were, to life

again, to fulfil her promise? And if it were so,—which seemed most probable to Madelon,—would it not be well to invite her further protection, and even by some small offering to give emphasis to her prayers? Madelon's notions, it will be perceived, were not in strict accordance with convent orthodoxy, which would scarcely have been willing to recognize the Virgin's help in a successful escape from the convent itself; but orthodox notions were the last things with which it was to be expected our Madelon would trouble herself. Without other thought than that here might be another and sure way of furthering her one object, she made her way into a church, and expending two sous in a lighted taper, carried it to a little side chapel, where, above a flower-decorated altar, a beneficent Madonna seemed to welcome all sad orphans in the world to her all-protecting embrace.

To me there is something infinitely touching in these shrines to the Virgin, with all their associations of suffering and prayer, in their little ex voto pictures, and flowers, and lighted tapers. I do not envy those who can see in them nothing but the expression of a pitiable superstition; to my mind they appeal to far wider sympathies, as one thinks of the sick and weary hearts who have come there to seek consolation and help. Everywhere one comes across these shrines—in the gloom of some great Cathedral, in some homely village church, in some humble wayside chapel, where, amidst sunny fields and pastures, amidst mountains, streams, and lakes, one reads the little heart-broken scrawls affixed to the grating, praying an Ave-Maria or Paternoster from the passer-by, for a sick person, for a mother watching beside her dying child, for a woman forsaken of the world. A whole atmosphere of con-

secrated suffering seems to float round these spots sacred to sorrow, the sorrow that humbly appeals, as it best knows how, to the love, wide enough to embrace and comfort all desolate, and yearning, and heavy-laden souls.

One can fancy Madelon as she walks along the dim church; one or two lights twinkle here and there in the darkness, the taper she holds shines on her pale little face, and her brown eyes are lighted up with a sudden glow of enthusiasm, devotion, supplication, as she kneels for a moment before the Virgin's altar, with an Ave-Maria on her lips, and an unspoken prayer in her heart.

Half an hour later, Madelon, in the midst of the blaze of light in the big gambling salon of the Redoute, is thinking of nothing in the world but rouge-et-noir, and the chances of the game before her. For the first time she has ventured to push her way

through the crowd and take a seat at the table; and for the moment she has forgotten her object, forgotten why she is there even, in the excitement of watching whether black or red will win. It matters little, it seems; whatever she stakes on, comes up; her small capital is being doubled and trebled. She had taken off her veil, which hitherto she had carefully kept down, and the little flushed face, with the eager eyes that sparkle with impatience at every pause in the game, is noticed by several people round the table. Her invariable luck, too, is remarked upon. "Stake for me, *mon enfant*," whispered a voice in her ear, and a little pile of five-franc pieces was put in front of her. Madelon, hardly thinking of what she did, staked the stranger's money along with her own on the red. It won. "Thank you, my child; it is the first time I have won to-night," said the voice again, as a long hand covered with rings

swept up the money. Madelon turned round quickly; behind her stood a woman with rouged cheeks, a low evening dress half concealed by a black lace shawl, beads and bracelets on her neck and arms—a common figure enough—there were half a dozen more such in the room—and she took no more notice of Madelon, but went on pricking her card without speaking to her again. But to the child there came a quick revulsion of feeling, that she could not have explained, as she shrank away from her gaudily-attired neighbour. All at once, the game seemed somehow to have lost its interest and excitement; the crowds, the heat, the light, suddenly oppressed her; for the first time her heart gave way. She felt scared, friendless, lonely. There came to her mind a thought of the peaceful faces of the black-robed sisters, a sound as of the tinkling bell ringing above the old cabbage ground, a

breath sweet with the scent of fresh roses in Jeanne-Marie's little garden; she had a momentary impulse to go, to fly somewhere, anywhere—ah! but whither? Whither in all the wide world could she go? Back to the convent to be made a nun? Back to Jeanne-Marie with her promise unfulfilled? "I will keep my promise, I will not be frightened," thinks the poor child bravely; "I will fancy that papa is in the room, and that he will take care of me." And all these thoughts pass through her head while the croupier is crying, "*Faites votre jeu, Messieurs, faites votre jeu!*" and in, and on she goes again.

And while she is intent on making Monsieur Horace's fortune, Monsieur Horace himself, not five hundred yards off, is walking up and down the Place Royale, listening to the band, and troubling his head not at all about fortune-making, but very much

about Madelon. On his recovery from his illness, he had come to Spa to drink the waters, and had been there nearly a month, during which time he had twice been over to Liége to make inquiries about Madelon. His dismay had been great, when, on his first visit to the convent, he had learnt that Mademoiselle Linders was dead, that her little niece had disappeared three or four months before, and that nothing had been heard of her since, with the exception of the vague, anonymous letter from Paris. He wrote off at once to Madame Lavaux, the only person with whom he could imagine Madeleine to have taken refuge; but, as we know, Madame Lavaux had neither seen her, nor heard anything about her. He had then, in his perplexity, written to her old friends in Florence, thinking it just possible they might be able to give him some information, but with no more success; he received an

answer from the American artist, in which he mentioned the death of the old violinist, lamented Madelon's disappearance, but, as may be supposed, gave no news of her.

Graham was greatly annoyed and perplexed. What could have become of the child? To whom could she have gone? She had had no friend but himself when he had last parted from her, and she could hardly, he imagined, have made any outside the convent walls. And why had she run away? Had she been unkindly treated? Why had she not written to him if she were in trouble? These, and a hundred other questions he asked himself, reproaching himself the while for not having kept up some kind of communication with her, or with Mademoiselle Linders. He had a real interest in, and affection for the child, whom he had befriended in her hour of need; and held himself besides in some sort responsible for her

welfare, after the promise he had made to her father on his death-bed. What was he to do if all traces of her were indeed lost? This very day he had again been over to Liége, had paid a second visit to the convent, and had made inquiries of every person who probably or improbably might have had news of her, but with no more result than before; and now, as he walked up and down the Place Royale, he was debating in his own mind whether he could take any further steps in the matter, or whether it must not rather now be left to time and chance to discover her hiding-place.

A shower of rain came on, dispersing the few people who had cared to linger in the open air on this raw, chilly evening; and Horace, leaving the Place, went up the street, which, with its lights and shops, looked cheerful by comparison, and, like the rest of the world, turned into the Redoute,

more than usually full, for it was the race-week, and numbers of strangers had come into the town. The ball-room, where dancing was going on, was crowded; and Graham, who, attracted by the music, had looked in, had soon had enough of the heat and noise. In a few minutes he had made his way into the gambling salon, and had joined one of the silent groups standing round the tables.

Meanwhile, Madelon, once more absorbed in the game, is meditating her grand *coup*. Hitherto she has been playing cautiously, her capital accumulating gradually, but surely, till she has quite a heap of gold and notes before her. It is already a fortune in her eyes, and she thinks, if she could only double this all at once, then indeed would the great task be accomplished; she might go then, she might write to Monsieur Horace, she would see him again—ah!

what joy, what happiness! Should she venture? Surely it would be very rash to risk all that at once—and yet if she were to win—and she has been so lucky this evening—her heart leaps up again—she hesitates a moment, then pushes the whole on to the black, reserving only one ten franc piece, and sits pale, breathless, incapable of moving, during what seemed to her the longest minute of her life. It was only a minute—the croupier dealt the cards—"*Rouge perd, et couleur*," he cried, paid the smaller stakes, and then, counting out gold and notes, pushed over to her what was, in fact, a sufficiently large sum, and which, to her inexperienced eyes, seemed enormous. "Who is she?" asked one or two of the bystanders of each other. "She has been winning all the evening." They shrugged their shoulders; nobody knew. As for Madelon, she heard none of their

remarks—she had won, she might go now, go and find Monsieur Horace; and as this thought crossed her mind, she gathered up her winnings, thrust them into her bag, and rose to depart. As she turned round, she faced Monsieur Horace himself, who had been standing behind her chair, little dreaming whose play it was he had been watching.

She recognised him in a moment, though he had grown thinner and browner since she had last seen him. "Monsieur Horace!—Monsieur Horace!" she cried.

He was still watching the game, but turned at the sound of her voice, and looked down on the excited little face before him. "Madelon!" he exclaimed—"Madelon here! —no, impossible! Madelon!"

"Yes, yes," she said, half laughing, half crying at the same time, "I am Madelon. Ah! come this way—let me show you. I

have something to show you this time—you will see, you will see!"

She seized both his hands as she spoke, and pulled him through the crowd into the adjoining reading-room. It was all lighted up, the table strewn with books and papers; but no one was there. Madelon was in a state of wild excitement and triumph.

"Look here," she cried, "I promised to make your fortune, did I not, Monsieur Horace?—and I have done it! Ah! you will be rich now—see here!" she poured the contents of her bag on the table before him. "Are you glad?" she said.

"Glad!—what on earth are you talking about? Where did you get this money, Madelon?"

"Where?—why, there, at the tables, to be sure—where else?" she answered, getting frightened at his manner.

"But—gracious powers! are you out of

your senses, child?" cried Graham. "Whatever possessed you to come here? What business have you in a place like this? Are you alone?"

"Yes, I am alone. I came to make your fortune," answered Madelon, dismayed.

"My fortune!" he repeated. "What can have put such a notion into your head? As for that money, the sooner you get rid of it the better. What the devil—good heavens! a baby like you!—here, give it to me!"

"What are you going to do?" cried Madelon, struck with sudden fear, as he swept it up in his hand.

"Take it back, of course," he answered, striding into the next room.

"Ah! you shall not!" she cried passionately, running after him, and seizing his hand; "it is mine, it is mine, you shall not have it!"

"Hush, Madelon," he said, turning round sharply, "don't make a disturbance here."

She made no answer, but clung with her whole weight to his arm as he approached the table. She dragged his hand back, she held it tight between hers; her face was quite pale, her teeth set in her childish passion.

"Madelon, let go!" said Graham; "do you hear what I say? Let go!"

"Give me my money back!" she cried, in a passionate whisper; "you have no right to take it; it is my own."

"Let go," he repeated, freeing his hand as he spoke. She seized it again, but it was too late; he had placed the money on the table, and with the other hand pushed it into the middle. A horrible pause, while Madelon clung tighter and tighter, watching breathlessly, till she saw the croupier rake in the whole. All was lost, then; she flung Horace's hand away, and rushed out of the room. "Madelon!" he cried, and followed her. Down the

lighted staircase, out into the lighted street, he could see the swift little figure darting, along the Place Royale, where he had been walking not half an hour ago, all quiet and dark now; the music gone, the people dispersed, the rain falling heavily. Still she ran on, into the avenue of the Promenade à Sept Heures. It was darker still there, only a rare lamp slanting here and there a long gleam of light across the wet path. Horace began to be afraid that he should lose her altogether, but she suddenly stumbled and fell, and when he came up to her, she was sitting all in a heap on the ground at the foot of a tree, her face buried in her hands, her frame shaking with sobs.

"Madelon," said Horace, stooping down, and trying to take her hands; "my little Madelon, my poor little child!"

She jumped up when she heard his voice, and started away from him.

"*Ne me touchez, pas je vous le défends,*" she cried, "*ne me touchez pas, je vous déteste—vous êtes un cruel—un perfide!*"

She began to sob again, and dropped down once more upon the ground, crouched upon the damp earth, strewn with dead fallen leaves. Her hat had fallen off, and the rain came down upon her uncovered head, wetting the short hair as it was blown about by the wind, drenching her thin little cloak and old black silk frock. A very pitiful sight as she sat there, a desolate, homeless child, on this dark, wet autumn night, deaf in her excess of childish rage to Horace's words, shaking him off with wilful, passionate gestures whenever he touched her—a very perplexing sight to the young man, who stood and watched her, uncertain what to say or do next.

At last she grew a little quieter, and then he spoke to her in a tone of authority.

"You must get up, Madelon; you will get quite wet if you stay there."

He took hold of her hand, and held it firmly when she tried to loosen it, and at last she got up slowly. As she rose, she became conscious of the wet and cold, and was completely sobered as she stood shivering at Horace's side.

"My poor little Madelon!" he said, in the kind voice she remembered from old times. "You are quite wet and so cold, we must not stay here; tell me where you are going?"

"I don't know," said Madelon, beginning to cry again. Only an hour ago she had been so full of joy and hope, with such a bright future before her; and now the rain and wind were beating in her face, above her the black sky, darkness all around; where indeed was she going?"

"But you have some friends here?" said

Horace—"you are not staying here all alone?"

"Yes, I am all alone," says Madelon, sobbing. "Oh! what shall I do?—what shall I do?"

"Don't cry so, Madelon," said Graham, "my poor child, don't be frightened. I will take care of you, but I want you to tell me all about this. Do you mean you are all alone in Spa?"

"Yes, I am all alone; I came here three days ago. I had been ill at Le Trooz, and a woman there—Jeanne-Marie—took care of me; but as soon as I was well and had money enough, I came to Spa, and went to the Hôtel de Madrid. Papa and I used to go there, and I knew Madame Bertrand who keeps it."

"So you slept there last night," said Horace, not a little mystified at the story,

but trying to elucidate some fact sufficiently plain to act upon.

"Yes, last night, and before. I left my things there, and meant to have gone back to-night, but I have no money now. What is to be done?" That grand question of money, so incomprehensible to children to whom all things seem to come by nature, had long ago been faced by Madeleine, but had never before, perhaps, presented itself as a problem so incapable of solution—as a question to be asked of such a very dreary, black, voiceless world, from which no answer could reasonably be expected. But, in truth, the answer was not far off.

"I will take care of all that," said Horace; "so now, come with me. Stay, here is your hat; we must not go without that."

He arranged her disordered hair and crushed hat, and then, taking her hand, led

her back towards the town, Madelon very subdued, and miserable, and cold, Horace greatly perplexed as to the meaning of it all, but quite resolved not to lose sight of his charge any more.

Arrived at the Hôtel de Madrid, he left Madelon for a moment in the shabby little coffee-room, while he asked to speak to Madame Bertrand. Madame Bertrand, as we know, was ill and in bed, but the maid brought down Madelon's bundle of things. Graham asked her a few questions, but the girl evidently knew nothing about the child. "Madame knew—she had dined in Madame's private room the last two days," but she could not tell anything more about her, and did not even know her name.

When Graham came back to the room, he found Madelon standing listlessly as he had left her; she had not moved. "Well," he said cheerily, "that is settled; now you

are my property for the present; you shall sleep at my hotel to-night."

"At your hotel?" she said, looking up at him.

"Yes, where I am staying. Your friend here is not well. I think I shall look after you better. You do not mind coming with me?"

"No, no!" she cried, beginning to cling to him in her old way—"I will go anywhere with you. Indeed I did not mean what I said, but I am very unhappy."

"You are tired and wet," answered Graham, "but we will soon set that to rights; you will see to-morrow, you will not be unhappy at all. Old friends like you and me, Madelon, should not cry at seeing each other again, should they?"

Talking to her in his kind, cheerful way, they walked briskly along till they arrived at the hotel. Madelon was tired out, and

he at once ordered a room, fire, and supper for her, and handed her over to the care of a good-natured chambermaid.

"Good night, Madelon. I will come and see after you to-morrow morning," he said smiling, as he left her.

She looked up at him for a moment with a most pitiful, eager longing in her eyes; then suddenly seizing his hands in her wild excited way—"Oh, Monsieur Horace, Monsieur Horace, if I could only tell you!" she cried; and then, as he left the room, and closed the door, she flung herself upon the floor in quite another passion of tears than that she had given way to in the Promenade à Sept Heures.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE OLD LETTER.

WHEN Horace went to see after Madelon the next morning, he found her already up and dressed. She opened her bedroom door in answer to his knock, and stood before him, her eyes cast down, her wavy hair all smooth and shining, even the old black silk frock arranged and neat—a very different little Madelon from the passionate, despairing, weeping child of the evening before.

"Good morning, Madelon," said Graham, taking her hand and looking at her with a smile and a gleam in his kind eyes;

"how are you to-day? did you sleep well?"

"I am very well, Monsieur," says Madelon, with her downcast eyes. "I have been up a long time. I have been thinking of what I shall do; I do not know, will you help me?"

"We will talk of that presently," said Graham, "but first we must have some breakfast; come downstairs with me now."

"Monsieur Horace," said Madelon, drawing back, "please I wanted to tell you, I know I was very naughty last night, and I am very sorry," and she looked up with her eyes full of tears.

"I don't think we either of us quite knew what we were doing last night," said Graham, squeezing her little hand in his; "let us agree to forget it, for the present at all events; I want you to come with me now; there is a lady downstairs who very much wishes to see you."

"To see me?" said Madelon, shrinking back again.

"Yes, don't be frightened, it is only my aunt. She wants to know you, and I think will be very fond of you. Will you come with me?" And then, as they went along the passage and downstairs, he explained to her that he was not alone at the hotel, but that his aunt, Mrs. Treherne, was also there, and that he had been telling her what old friends he and Madelon were, and how unexpectedly they had met last night.

He opened the door of a sitting-room on the *premier*; a wood-fire was crackling, breakfast was on the table, and before the coffee-pot stood a lady dressed in black.

"Here is Madelon, Aunt Barbara," said Graham, and Mrs. Treherne came forward, a tall, gracious, fair woman, with stately manners, and a beautiful sad face.

"My dear," she said, taking Madelon's

hand, "Horace has been telling me about you, and from what he says, I think you and I must become better acquainted. He tells me your name is Madeleine Linders."

"Yes, Madame," says Madelon rather shyly, and glancing up at the beautiful face, which, with blue eyes and golden hair still undimmed, might have been that of some fair saint or Madonna, but for a certain chilling expression of cold sadness.

"I knew something of a Monsieur Linders once," said Mrs. Treherne, "and I think he must have been your father, my dear. Your mother was English, was she not? Can you tell me what her name was before she married?"

"I—I do not know," said Madelon, "she died when I was quite a baby."

"Nearly thirteen years ago, that would be? Yes, that is as I thought; but have you never heard her English name, never seen

it written? Have you nothing that once belonged to her?

"Yes, Madame," answered Madelon, "there is a box at the convent that was full of things, clothes, and some books. There was a name written in them—ah! I cannot remember it—it was English."

"Moore?" asked Mrs. Treherne. "Stay, I will write it. Magdalen Moore—was that it?"

"Yes," said Madelon, "I think it was—yes, I know it was. I remember the letters now. But I have something of hers here, too," she added—"a letter, that I found in the pocket of this dress—this was mamma's once, and it was in the trunk. Shall I fetch it, it is upstairs?"

"Yes, I should like to see it, my dear. You will wonder at all these questions, but, if I am not mistaken, your mother was a very dear friend of mine."

Madelon left the room, and Mrs. Treherne, sitting down at the table, began to arrange her breakfast-cups. Horace was standing with one arm on the mantelpiece, gazing into the fire; he had been silent during this short interview, but as Madelon disappeared,

"Is she at all like her mother?" he inquired.

"She is like—yes, certainly she is like; her eyes remind me of Magdalen's—and yet she is unlike, too."

"You must be prepared," said Horace, after a moment's pause, "to find her devoted to her father's memory; and not without reason, I must say, for he was devoted to her, after his own fashion. She thinks him absolute perfection; and, in fact, I believe this escapade of hers to have been entirely founded on precedents furnished by him."

"I think it is the most dreadful thing I ever heard of," said Mrs. Treherne—"a child of that age alone in such a place!"

"Well, I really don't know," answered Graham, half laughing. "I don't suppose it has done her much mischief; and of this I am quite sure, that she had no idea of there being any more harm in going to a gambling-table than in going for a walk."

"That appears to me the worst part of it, that a child should have been brought up in such ignorance of right and wrong. However, she can be taught differently."

"Certainly; but don't you think the teaching had better come gradually?—it would break her heart, to begin with, to be told her father is not everything she imagines—if indeed she could be made to understand it just yet, which I doubt."

"Of course it would be cruel to shake a child's faith in her father," answered Mrs.

Treherne; "but she must learn it in time. Monsieur Linders was one of the most worthless men that ever lived, and Charles Moore was as bad, if not worse. I wonder —good heavens, Horace, how one wonders at such things!—I wonder what Magdalen had done that she should be left to the mercy of two such men as those."

"Well, it is no fault of Madelon's, at any rate," Horace began; and then stopped, as the door opened, and Madelon came in. In her hand she carried a queer little bundle of treasures, that she had brought away with her from the convent—the old German's letter, the two that Horace had sent her, and one or two other things, all tied together with a silk thread.

"This is the letter," she said, selecting one from the packet, and giving it to Mrs. Treherne. It was the one she had read in the evening twilight in her convent cell

last May. "I am afraid there is no name on it, for there is no beginning nor ending. I think it must have been burnt."

"Why, that is your writing, Aunt Barbara," said Graham, who had come forward to inspect these relics.

"Yes, it is mine," said Mrs. Treherne. "It was written by me many years ago."

She glanced at the letter as she spoke, then crushed it up quickly in her hand, and with a sudden flush on her pale cheek, turned to Madelon.

"My dear," she said, putting one arm round the child's waist, and caressing her hair with the other hand, "I knew your mother very well; she was my cousin, and the very dearest friend I ever had. I think you must come and live with me, and be my child, as there is no one else who has any claim on you."

"Did you know mamma, Madame?" said

Madelon. "And papa—did you know him too?"

"No, my dear, I never knew your father," said Mrs. Treherne, with a change in her voice, and relaxing her hold of the child.

"You forget, Madelon," said Graham, coming to the rescue, "your father never went to England, so he did not make acquaintance with your mother's friends. But that is not the question now; my aunt wants to know if you will not come and live with her in England, and be her little girl? That would be pleasanter than the convent, would it not?"

"Yes, thank you. I should like to go and live in England very much," said Madelon, her eyes wandering wistfully from Mrs. Treherne to Graham. "And with you, too, Monsieur Horace?" she added quickly.

"Not with me exactly," he answered, taking her hand in his; "for I am going off

to America in a month or two, and you know we agreed that you and I could not go about the world together; but I shall often hear of you, and from you, and be quite sure that you are happy; and that will be a great thing, will it not?"

"Yes, thank you," she said again. Her eyes filled with sudden tears, but they did not fall. It was a very puzzling world in which she found herself, and events, which only yesterday she had thought to guide after her own fashion, had escaped quite beyond the control of her small hand.

Perhaps Mrs. Treherne saw how bewildered she was, for she drew her towards her again, and kissed her, and told her that she was her child now, and that she would take care of her, and love her for her mother's sake.

"Now let us have some breakfast," she said. "After that we will see what we

have to do, for I am going to leave Spa to-morrow."

Late in the afternoon of the same day, Horace, who had been out since the morning, coming into the sitting-room, found Madelon there alone. It was growing dark, and she was sitting in a big arm-chair by the fire, her eyes fixed on the crackling wood, her hands lying listlessly in her lap. She hardly looked up, or stirred as Graham came in, and drew a chair to her side.

"Well, Madelon," he said, cheerfully, "so we start for England to-morrow?"

"Yes," she said; but there was no animation in her manner.

"Has my aunt told you?" he went on. "We are going to sleep at Liége, so that she may go to the convent, and settle matters there finally, and let the nuns know they are not to expect you back again."

"Yes, I know," said Madelon. "Monsieur Horace, do you think we might stop for just a little while—for half an hour—at Le Trooz, to see Jeanne-Marie? She would not like me to go away without wishing her good-bye."

"Of course we will. It was Jeanne-Marie who took care of you when you were ill, was it not? Tell me the whole story, Madelon. What made you run away from Liége?"

"There was a fever in the convent; I caught it, and Aunt Thérèse died; and when I was getting well I heard the nuns talking about it, and saying I was to live in the convent always, and be made a nun—and I could not, oh! I could not—papa said I was never to be a nun, and it would have been so dreadful; and I could not have kept my promise to you, either."

"What was this promise, Madelon? I

can't remember your making me one, or anything about it."

"Yes, don't you know? That evening at Liége, the night before I went into the convent, when we were taking a walk. You said you wanted to make your fortune, and I said I would do it for you. I knew how, and I thought you did not. I meant to do it at once, but I could not, and I was afraid you would think I had forgotten the promise, and would want the money, so I got out of the window and came to Spa. But I lost all my money the first time I went to the tables, and there was a lady who wanted to take me back to the convent; but she went to sleep in the train, and I got out at Le Trooz. I don't remember much after that, for the fever came on again; but Jeanne-Marie, who keeps a restaurant in the village, found me in the church, she says, and took me home, and nursed me till I was well."

"And how long ago was all this?"

"It was last May that I ran away from the convent, and I was with Jeanne-Marie all the summer; but as soon as I was well again, and had enough money, I came back here—that was four days ago; and last night I had the money, and to-day I should have written to you to tell you that I had kept my promise, and made your fortune."

"And so it was all for me," said Graham, with a sudden pang of tenderness and remorse. "My poor little Madelon, you must have thought me very cruel and unkind last night."

"Never mind," she answered, "you did not understand; I thought you knew I had promised," but she turned away her head as she spoke, and Graham saw that she was crying.

"Indeed I don't remember anything

about it," he said; "why, my poor child, I should never have thought of such a thing. Well, never mind, Madelon, you shall come to England with us. Do you know you are a sort of cousin of mine?"

"Am I?" she answered, "did you know mamma as well as Mrs.——as Madame votre Tante?"

"Well, no; the fact is I never even heard her married name, though I knew we had some relations named Moore, for she was my mother's cousin, also. But she went abroad and married when I was quite a child, and died a few years afterwards, and that is how it happened that I never heard of, or saw her."

"Ah! well, you knew papa," said Madelon; and then there was silence between them for a minute, till a flame leaping up, showed Madelon's face, all tearful and woebegone.

"You are not happy, Madelon," said Graham. "What is it? Can I help you in any way? Is there anything I can do for you?"

She fairly burst into sobs as he spoke.

"Monsieur Horace," she answered, "I—I *wanted* to make your fortune; I had looked forward to it for such a long time, and I was so happy when I had done it, and I thought you would be so pleased and glad, too, and now it is all at an end——"

How was Graham to console her? How explain it all to her? "Listen to me, Madelon," he said at last; "I think you were a dear little girl to have such a kind thought for me, and I don't know how to thank you enough for it; but it was all a mistake, and you must not fret about it now. I don't think I care so very much about having a fortune; and anyhow, I like working hard,

and getting money that way for myself."

"But mine is the best and quickest way," said Madelon unconvinced; "it was what papa always did."

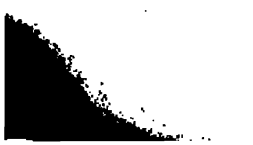
"Yes, but you know everybody does not set to work the same way, and I think I like mine best for myself."

"Do you?" she said, looking at him wistfully; "and may I not go and try again, then?"

"No, no," he answered kindly, "that would not do at all, Madelon; it does not do for little girls to run about the world making fortunes. Your father used to take you to those rooms, but he would not have liked to have seen you there alone last night, and you must never go again."

He tried to speak lightly, but the words aroused some new consciousness in the child, and she coloured scarlet.

"I—I did not know—" she began; and then stopped suddenly, and never again spoke of making Monsieur Horace's fortune.



CHAPTER XVIII.

PARTINGS.

SO it was something like the end of a fairy tale after all; for a carriage stopped before the restaurant at Le Trooz, and out of it came a gentleman, and a lady beautiful enough to be a fairy godmother, and the little wandering Princess herself, no other than our Madelon, who ran up to Jeanne-Marie as she came to the door, and clasping her round the neck, clung to her more tightly than she had ever clung before, till the woman, disengaging herself, turned to speak to her other visitors. Mrs. Treherne came into the little public room, which hap-

pened to be empty just then, and sitting down on one of the wooden chairs, began to talk to Jeanne-Marie; whilst Madelon, escaping, made her way to the garden at the back, where she had spent so many peaceful hours. It was not a week since she had been there and it looked all unchanged; the sun was shining again after the last few days, and filling the air with summer heat and radiance; the grapes were ripening on the wall; the bees humming among the flowers; Jeanne-Marie's pots and pans stood in the kitchen window. How quiet, and sunny, and familiar it looked! Madelon half expected to find her chair set in the old shady corner, to see Jeanne-Marie's face appearing through the screen of vine-leaves at the open window, to hear her voice calling to her to leave her work, and come and help her make the soup! Ah no, it was not all unchanged; was there indeed anything the same as in the old days

that already seemed such ages distant, the old time gone for ever? With a sudden pang, Madelon turned away, and went quickly up the outside staircase, all overgrown with unpruned sprays and tendrils, into the room she had occupied for so many weeks. How happy she had been there! what dreams she had dreamed, what hopes she had cherished, what visions she had indulged in! Where were they all now? Where was that golden future to which she had so confidently looked forward, for which she had worked, and striven, and ventured all? She knelt down by the bed, flinging her arms out over the coarse blue counterpane. Ah, if she had but died there, died while she was all unconscious, before this cruel grief and disappointment had come upon her!

And meanwhile, Jeanne-Marie, in the room below, had been hardening her heart against the child after her own fashion. She

had answered Mrs. Treherne's questions curtly, rejected the faintest suggestion of money as an insult, and stood eyeing Graham defiantly while the talk went on. "Madelon has grand new friends now," she was thinking all the time very likely, "and will go away and be happy, and forget all about me; well, let her go—what does it matter?" And then presently, going upstairs to look for this happy, triumphant Madelon, she found her crouching on the floor, trying to stifle the sound of her despairing sobs.

"Oh, Jeanne-Marie, Jeanne-Marie," she cried, as soon as she could speak, "I wish I might stay with you, I wish I had never gone away; what was the use of it all? I thought I was going to be so happy, and now I am to go to England, and Monsieur Horace is to go to America, and I shall never, never, be happy again!"

"What was the use of what?" says Jeanne-Marie, taking the child into her kind arms; "why will you never be happy again? Are they unkind to you? Is that gentleman downstairs, Monsieur Horace that you used to talk about?"

"Yes, that is Monsieur Horace—ah, no, he is not unkind, he is kinder than anyone —you do not understand, Jeanne-Marie, and I cannot tell you, but I am very unhappy." She put her arms round the woman's neck, and hid her face on her shoulder. In truth, Jeanne-Marie did not understand what all this terrible grief and despair were about. Madelon, as we know, had never confided her hopes, and plans, and wishes to her; but she knew that the child whom she loved better than all the world was in trouble, and that she must send her away without being able to say a word to comfort her, and that seemed hard to bear.

So they sat silent for awhile; and then Jeanne-Marie got up.

"You must go, *ma petite*," she said, "Madame is waiting, and I came to fetch you." She walked to the door, and then turned round suddenly. "*Ecoutes, mon enfant*," she said, placing her two hands on Madelon's shoulders, and looking down into her face, "you will not forget me? I —I should not like to think you will go away, and forget me."

"Never!" cried Madelon; "how could I? I will never forget you, Jeanne-Marie, and some day, if I can, I will come back and see you."

So they parted, and, of the two, it was the brave, faithful heart of the woman that suffered the sharper pang, though she went about her daily work without saying a word or shedding a tear.

Mrs. Treherne had large estates in Cornwall, on which, since her husband's death, she had almost constantly resided; and thither, with Madelon, she proceeded, a few days after their arrival in London. Graham did not go with them. He had been appointed to accompany a government exploring-party into Central America, and his time was fully occupied with business to settle, arrangements to make, outfit to purchase, and, moreover, with running down to his sister's house in the country as often as possible, so as to devote every spare hour to Miss Leslie. The summer love-making had ended in an engagement before he started for Spa—an engagement which—neither he nor Miss Leslie having any money to speak of—promised to be of quite indefinite length. In the midst of all his bustle, however, Graham contrived to take Madelon to as many sights as could be crowded into the

three or four days that they stayed at the London hotel; and in a thousand kind ways tried to encourage and cheer the child, who never said a word about her grief, but drooped more and more as the moment for separation drew near. Graham went to see her and his aunt off at the Great Western terminus, and it was amidst all the noise, and hurry, and confusion of a railway-station that they parted at last. It was all over in a minute, and as Graham stood on the platform, watching the train move slowly out of the station, a little white face appeared at a carriage window, two brown eyes gazed wistfully after him, a little hand waved one more farewell. It was his last glimpse of our small Madelon.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

LETTERS.

FOR five years Horace Graham was a wanderer on the other side of the Atlantic. He had left England with the intention of remaining abroad for two years only, but at the end of that time, when the exploring party to which he belonged was returning home, he did not find it difficult to make excuses for remaining behind. He had only begun to see the country, he said in his letters to England; he knew two men who were going further south, to Paraguay, to La Plata, to Patagonia, perhaps, and he meant to accompany them and see what was

to be seen; time enough to think of coming home afterwards; of what use would it be for him to return just then? "We are both young," he wrote to his future wife, Maria Leslie, "and can well afford to wait a year or two before settling down into sober married life. You, my dear Maria, who so often said this to me when, in the first days of our engagement, I urged a speedy marriage, will, I know, agree with me. I see now that in those days you were right and I was wrong. We are not rich enough to marry; I should do wrong to make you submit to all the trials and hardships which struggling poverty entails; though indeed, in all the world, I know of no one so well fitted to meet them as my dearest Molly. How often we used to picture to ourselves some little snuggery where you could knit and darn stockings, and I could smoke my pipe!—is not that the correct

division of labour between man and woman? Well, some day we will have some such dear little hole, and I will smoke my pipe, but you shall not be condemned to stitching —you shall do—let me see, what shall you do?—anything in the world you like best, my dear girl; for I mean to be a rich man in those days, which I often picture to myself as the good time coming, to which some of us are looking forward. When I hear of an opening in England I shall return, perhaps sooner, if it is very long in coming; unless, indeed, you would like to join me out here. What do you think of that proposal? We could settle down comfortably in Peru or Mexico, and you could make friends among the Spanish ladies, and learn from them to sleep all day, and dance all night, unless you would prefer to accompany my pipe with your cigarette; for of course you too would smoke, like every one else.

And from time to time we could go on long expeditions, such as I am making now—day and night in an open boat, on some river flowing through trackless forests, great trees dipping down into the water, strange flowers blooming overhead, strange beasts that one never saw before, hopping and rushing about; and mosquitoes, of which one has seen plenty, eating one up alive at every opportunity. My poor Molly! I can see your face of dismay. No, don't be afraid; you shall not be asked to leave your own comfortable home till I can return and take you to as good a one; and then I mean to write a book about my adventures, and you shall do nothing worse than shudder over them at your leisure at our own fire-side."

To which Maria replied:—"I think, my dear Horace, you are quite right not to hurry home; as you say, we are both young,

and have life before us; and do not trouble yourself about me, for as long as I hear that you are well and happy, I can and ought to desire nothing further. The idea of coming out to you made me shiver indeed; you will say I am very unenterprising, but I don't think I should ever care about leaving England; one is so happy here, what more can one desire? What can I tell you in return for your long letter? Georgie will have given you all the village news, no doubt; has she told you that we have a new curate —Mr. Morris? He preached last Sunday, and is a great improvement on Mr. Saunders, who was the dullest man I ever heard. The school gets on nicely; I have two more pupils, and receive many compliments, I assure you, on the way in which I manage my class. I sometimes wonder if it could not be arranged some day, that you should enter into partnership with Dr. Vavasour,

who is growing old, and gets tired with his day's work? I often think of this, and of how pleasant it would be, but, as you may suppose, have never even hinted at it to your sister. Is it such a very wild castle in the air? It is a very pleasant one, and I sometimes sit and think it all over. We should never have to leave Ashurst then; there is a pretty little house lately built at the end of the village, which would just suit us, I think; you could write your book, and when it was done, read it to me, as you know I do not much care about reading. You should smoke your pipe as much as you please, and I would sit and work, for there is nothing I like doing better, and I should find it very uncomfortable to sit with my hands before me. Do you think I mean to grow idle in my old age? No, not if we have a hundred thousand a year, for I am sure there must be always something for

everyone to do," and so on; a little moral sentiment closed the letter.

When Graham received it, he read it over twice, and sighed a little as he folded it up, and put it away. He was relieved that Maria should take such a calm view of the subject, for he had felt his own letter to be somewhat egotistical, and yet—well, right or wrong, he could not help it; he *could* not give up his travels and researches just then. The spirit of adventure was upon him, driving him, as it has driven many a man before, further and further into the wilderness, heedless of danger, and hardships, and discomfort; almost heedless, too, of home, and friends, and love—all that, he would have time to think of at some future day, when he should find himself obliged to return to England. Maria's suggestion of the country partnership as the goal of his ambition and his hopes, her picture of the new house at

the end of the village, rose before his mind, but in no such tempting light as before hers. "She is a dear, good girl," he thought, "but she does not understand. Well, I suppose it will come to that, or something like that, at least; what better can one look forward to? one cannot roam about the world for ever—at least, I cannot, bound as I am; not that I repent that," and then it was that he sighed. Nevertheless he did roam about for three years longer; and then his health giving way, he was obliged to return to England, and arrived at his sister's house, a bronzed, meagre, bearded traveller, with his youth gone for ever, and years of life, and adventure, and toil separating him from the lad who had first seen little Madelon at Chaudfontaine.

He had not forgotten her; it would have been strange indeed if he had, for Mrs. Treherne's letters, which followed him in

his wanderings with tolerable regularity, were apt to be full of Madeleine; and in them would often be enclosed a sheet, on which, in her cramped foreign handwriting, Madelon would have recorded, for Monsieur Horace's benefit, the small experiences of her every-day life.

"I am learning very hard," so these little effusions would run; "and Aunt Barbara says that I advance in my studies, but that I shall do better when I go to London, for I will have masters then, and go to classes. I like Cornwall very much; I have a garden of my own, but the flowers will not grow very well—the gardener says the wind from the sea will kill them. It seems to me there is always a wind here, and last week there was a great storm, and many ships were wrecked. Aunt Barbara said she was glad you were the other side of the ocean, and so indeed was I. I never thought the wind

and sea could make so much noise; it is not here as at Nice with the Mediterranean, which was almost always calm, and tranquil, and blue like the sky. Here the sea is grey like the sky—that makes a great difference. Will you soon write to me once more? I read your letter to me over and over again. I like to hear all about the strange countries you are in, and I should like to see them too. We have a book of travels which tells us all about South America, and I read it very often. I send you one little primrose that I gathered to-day in my garden."

Again, nearly a year later.

"I do not know how people can like to live always in one place, when there is so much that is beautiful to see in the world. Aunt Barbara says that she would be content always to live in Cornwall; and it is very kind of her to come to London,

for it is that I may have masters, she says; but I cannot help being glad, for I was so tired of the rocks, and the sea always the same. We arrived last week, and Aunt Barbara says we shall stay the whole winter, and come back every year, very likely. I like our house very much; it is in Westminster, not far from the Abbey, where I went with you; one side looks on to the street, that is rather dull; but the other looks on to St. James's Park, where I go to walk with Aunt Barbara. We went to the Abbey last Sunday; it reminded me of the churches abroad, and the singing was so beautiful. In Cornwall there was only a fiddle and a cracked flute, and everybody sang out of tune; I did not like going to church there at all. Please write to me soon, Monsieur Horace, and tell me where you are, and what you are doing; I fancy it all to myself—the big forests, and the

rivers, and the flowers, and everything."

Accompanying these would be Mrs. Treherne's reports:

"Madeleine improves every day, I think. She is much grown, and resembles her mother more and more, though she will never be so beautiful, to my mind; she has not, and never will have, Magdalen's English air and complexion. She gets on well with her London masters and classes, and has great advantages in many ways over girls of her own age, especially in her knowledge of foreign languages. I trust that by degrees the memory of her disastrous past may fade away; we never speak of it, and she is so constantly employed, and seems to take so much interest in her occupation and studies, that I hope she is ceasing to think of old days, and will grow up the quiet, English girl I could wish to see Magdalen's daughter. Indeed she is almost too

quiet and wanting in the gaiety and animation natural to girls of her age; but otherwise I have not a fault to find with her. She is fond of reading, and gets hold of every book of travels she can hear of, that will give her any idea of the country you are exploring. We share your letters, my dear Horace, and follow you in all your wanderings, with the greatest interest——"

One more letter.

"March 1st, 186—.

"My dear Monsieur Horace,

"Aunt Barbara bids me write and welcome you back to England. We look forward to seeing you very much; but she says, if you can remain with your sister a week longer, it will be better than coming down to Cornwall now, as we shall be in London on Monday next, at the latest. We should have come up to town

for Christmas as usual, if Aunt Barbara had not been so unwell; and now that she is strong again, she wishes to be there as soon as possible. It would not be worth while, therefore, for you to make so long a journey just now. I hope you will come and see us soon; it seems a long, long time since you went away—more than five years.

"Ever your affectionate

"MADELEINE LINDERS."

It was at the end of a dull March day that Horace Graham, just arrived from Kent, made his way to his aunt's house in Westminster. He thought more of Madelon than of Mrs. Treherne, very likely, as the cab rattled along from the station. There had never been much affection or sympathy between him and his aunt, although he had always been grateful to her, for her kindness to him as a boy; but she was not a person

who inspired much warmth of feeling, and his sister's little house in the village where he had been born, had always appeared to him more home-like than the great Cornwall house, where, as a lad, he had been expected to spend the greater part of his holidays. But he was pleased with the idea of seeing his little Madelon again. He had not needed letters to remind him of her during all these years; he had often thought of the child whom he had twice rescued in moments of desolation and peril, and who had been the heroine of such a romantic little episode—thought of her and her doings with a sort of wonder sometimes, at her daring, her independence, her devotion—and all for him! When Graham thought of this, he felt very tender towards his foolish, rash, loving little Madelon; he felt so now, as he drove along to Westminster; he would not realize how much she must be

altered; she came before him always as the little pale-faced girl, with short curly hair, in a shabby black silk frock. It was a picture that, somehow, had made itself a sure resting-place in Graham's heart.

"We did not expect you till the late train, sir; it is close upon dinner-time, and the ladies are upstairs in the drawing-room, I believe," said the old butler who opened the door.

"Upstairs? in the drawing-room?" said Graham; "stop, I will find my way, Burchett, if you will look after my things."

He ran upstairs; the house was strange to him, but a door stood open on the first landing, and going in, he found himself in a drawing-room, where the firelight glowed and flickered on picture-lined walls, and chintz-covered easy-chairs and sofas, on an open piano, on flower stands filled with hyacinths and crocuses, on the windows

looking out on the dark March night, and the leafless trees in the Park. No one was there—he saw that at a glance, as he looked round on the warm, firelit scene; but even as he ascertained the fact, some one appeared, coming through the curtains that hung over the folding-doors between the two drawing-rooms—some one who gave a great start when she saw him, and then came forward blushing and confused. "My aunt is up-stairs,"—she began, then stopped suddenly, glancing up at this stranger with the lean brown face, and long rough beard. "Monsieur Horace!" she cried, springing forward. He saw a tall, slim girl, all in soft flowing white, he saw two hands stretched out in joyous welcome, he saw two brown eyes shining with eager gladness and surprise; and all at once the old picture vanished from his mind, and he knew that this was Madelon.

CHAPTER II.

SEHNSUCHT.

GRAHAM had numberless engagements in London, and except at breakfast, or at lunch perhaps, little was seen of him at his aunt's house during the first days after his arrival in town. One evening, however, coming home earlier than usual, he found the two ladies still in the drawing-room, and joining them at the fireside, he first made Madelon sing to him, and then, beginning to talk, the conversation went on till long after midnight, as he sat relating his travels and adventures. Presently he brought out his journal, and read

extracts from it, filling up the brief, hurried notes with fuller details as he went on, and describing to them the plan of his book, some chapters of which were already written, and which he hoped to bring out before the season was over. Mrs. Treherne was a perfect listener; she was sufficiently well-informed to make it worth while to tell her more, and she knew how to put intelligent questions just at the right moment. As for Madelon, she had been busily engaged on some piece of embroidery when he first began talking, but gradually her hands had dropped into her lap, and with her eyes fixed on him in the frankest unconsciousness, she had become utterly absorbed in what he was saying. Graham's whole heart was in his work, past and present, and this rapt, naïve interest on the part of the girl, at once flattered and encouraged him.

"I can trust you two," he said, putting

away his papers at last, "and I am not forestalling my public too much in letting you hear all this; but you are my first auditors, and my first critics. You won't betray me, Madelon?" he added, turning to her with a smile.

She shook her head, smiling back at him without speaking; and then, rising, began to fold up her work, while Mrs. Treherne said,

"I should have thought you would have found your first audience at Ashurst."

"I did try it one evening," he said, "but one of the children began to scream, and Georgie had to go and attend to it; and the Doctor went to sleep, and Maria, who had been all the afternoon in a stuffy schoolroom, looking after a school-feast or something of the sort, told me not to mind her, and presently went to sleep too; so I gave it up after that."

"It was certainly not encouraging," said Mrs. Treherne; "but you must surely have fallen upon an unfortunate moment; they do not go to sleep every evening, I presume?"

He did not answer; he was looking at Madelon, his eyes following her as she moved here and there about the room, putting away her work, closing the piano, setting things in order for the night. It was a habit he had taken up, this of watching her whenever they were in the room together, wondering perhaps how his little Madelon had grown into one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen. Indeed she was little Madelon no longer—and yet not wholly altered after all. She was tall now, above the middle height, and her hair was a shade darker, and fastened up in long plaits at the back of her head; but her cheeks were pale as in old days, and a

slight accent, an occasional idiom, something exceptional in style, and gesture, and manner, showed at once, and unmistakeably, her foreign birth and breeding. As Mrs. Treherne had once said, she had not, and never would have, an English air and complexion; but her beauty was not the less refined and rare that the clear, fair cheeks were without a tinge of colour, that one had to seek it in the pure red lips, the soft brown hair, the slight eyebrows and dark lashes, the lovely eyes that had learnt to express the thought they had once only suggested, but still retained something of the old, childish, wistful look. And yet Graham watched her with a vague sense of disappointment.

"What do you think of Madeleine?" Mrs. Treherne said to him the following afternoon; he had come in early, and they were together alone in the drawing-room. "Do you not find her grown and improved?

Do you think her pretty? She is perhaps rather pale, but——"

"She has certainly grown, Aunt Barbara, but that is not astonishing—young ladies generally do grow between the ages of thirteen and eighteen: and I think her the prettiest girl I ever saw—not at all too pale. As for being improved—well—I suppose she is. She wears very nice dresses, I observe, and holds herself straight, and I daresay knows more geography and history than when we last parted."

"You are disappointed in her," said Mrs. Treherne. "Do you know I suspected as much, Horace, from the way in which you look at her, and speak to her. Tell me in what way—why you are not satisfied?"

"But I am satisfied," cried Graham; "why should I not be? Madelon appears to me to have every accomplishment a young lady should have; she sings to perfection, I dare-

say dances equally well, and I have no doubt that on examination she would prove equally proficient in all the ologies. I am perfectly satisfied, so far as it is any concern of mine, but I don't see what right I have to be sitting in judgment one way or the other."

"You have every right, Horace; I have always looked upon you as the child's guardian in a way, and in all my plans concerning her education I have considered myself, to a certain extent, responsible to you."

"It was very good of you, Aunt Barbara, to consider me in the matter. I thought my responsibility had ceased from the moment you took charge of her; but for her father's sake—does Madelon ever speak of him, by-the-by?"

"Never."

"Never alludes to her past life?"

"Never—we never speak of it; I have carefully avoided doing so, in the hope that

with time, and a settled home, and new interests, she would cease to think of it altogether; and I trust I have succeeded. The memory of it can only be painful to her now, poor child, for, though I have never referred to the subject in any way, I feel convinced she must have learnt by this time to see her father's character in its true light."

"It is possible," said Graham. "Well, as I was saying, Aunt Barbara, for the sake of the promise I made her father on his death-bed, if for no other reason, I shall and must always take an interest in Madelon."

"And I for her mother's sake," replied Mrs. Treherne stiffly. "If you have no other interest in Madeleine than——however, it is useless to discuss that. I want to know how we have disappointed you—Madeleine and I—for you are disappointed; tell me, Horace—I am really anxious to know."

"Dear Aunt Barbara, I am not at all disappointed; or, if I am, it is not your fault or hers—quite the reverse. Nothing but the perversity of human nature. Shall I own the truth? All these years I have kept in my mind a dear little girl in a shabby old frock which she had outgrown—a dear, affectionate little soul, with so few ideas on people and things, that she actually took me for one of the best and wisest of human beings. See how much vanity there is in it all! I come back, and find a demure, well-drilled, fashionable young lady. I might have known how it would be, but it gave me a sort of shock, I own—my little wild Madelon gone for ever and a day, and this proper young lady in her place."

"You are unreasonable, Horace," said Mrs. Treherne, half laughing, half vexed; "and ungrateful, too, when Madeleine has been working so hard, with the hope, I

know, of pleasing and astonishing you with her doings."

"But I am pleased," said Graham. "Astonished? no—I cannot be astonished that Madeleine, with you to help her, should accomplish anything; but I am delighted, charmed—what more shall I say? So much so, Aunt Barbara, that when I am married, as I mean to be shortly, and set up a house of my own, you and Madelon will have to pay me visits of any length. I *shall* always feel that I have a sort of property in her, through early associations."

"Are you going to be married shortly?" said Mrs. Treherne; "have you anything definite to do? Where are you going to settle?"

"Do you not know?" he answered. "Dr. Vavasour has offered me a partnership."

"And you have accepted it?"

"Not yet—he has given me six months to think it over, so I need not hurry my decision; and, in the meantime, I have plenty to do with my book; in fact, I need the rest."

"It seems a pity—" began Mrs. Treherne.

"What seems a pity, Aunt Barbara?"

"That with your talents you should settle down for life in a country village; you could surely do something better?"

"I don't know," he answered with a sigh; "there is nothing else very obvious at present, and I cannot be a rover all my life. For one thing, my health would not allow of my taking up that sort of thing again just at present; and then there is Maria to be considered. She hates the idea of leaving Ashurst, and it has been her dream for years that this partnership should be offered me, and that I should accept it. I owe it to

her to settle down into steady married life before long."

He rose, as he said these last words, and walked to the window. Mrs. Treherne was called away at the same moment, and he stood gazing out at the strip of garden before the house, the Birdcage Walk beyond, the trees in the Park blowing about against the dull sky. His thoughts were not there; they had wandered away to the tropics, to the glowing skies, the strange lands, the wild, free life in which his soul delighted. He was glad to find himself in England once more, amongst kindred and friends, but he loathed the thought of being henceforth tied down to a life from which all freedom would be banished, which must be spent in the dull routine of a country parish. Graham was not now the lad who had once looked on the world as lying at his feet, on all possibilities as being within his grasp;

he had long ceased to be a hero in his own eyes; he had learnt one of life's sternest lessons, he had touched the limits of his own powers. But in thus gaining the knowledge of what he could not do, he had also proved what he could do—he had recognized the bent of his genius, and he knew that of all the mistakes of his life, he had committed none more grievous, than that of binding himself to a woman who neither sympathised, nor pretended to sympathise with him and his pursuits, and in compliance with whose wishes he was preparing to take up the life, for which, of all others, within the limits of his profession, he felt himself the least suited. And she? Did she care for him?—did she love him enough to make it worth the sacrifice?—was there the least chance of their ever being happy together? Ah! what lover's meeting had that been, that had passed between them at

his sister's house! What half concealed indifference on her side, what embarrassment on his, what silence falling between them, what vain efforts to shake off an ever-increasing coldness and constraint! It was five years since they had parted—was it only years and distance that had estranged them, or had they been unsuited to each other from the beginning? Not even now would Graham acknowledge to himself that it was so, but it was a conviction he had been struggling against for years.

"Will you take some tea, Monsieur Horace?" said a voice behind him. He turned round; the grey daylight was fading into grey dusk, afternoon tea had been brought in, and Madelon was standing by him with a cup in her hand. "Aunt Barbara has gone out, and will not be home till dinner-time," she added, as she returned to the tea-table, and fireside.

"Then you and I will drink tea together, Madelon," said Graham, seating himself in an arm-chair opposite to her. "Where have you been all this afternoon? Have you been out too?"

"I have been to a singing class; I generally go twice a week when we are in town."

"And do you like it?"

"Yes, I like it very much."

So much they said, and then a silence ensued. Madelon drank her tea, and Graham sat looking at her. Yes, a change had certainly come over her; this Madelon, who came and went so quietly, with a certain harmonious grace in every movement, this Madelon, who sometimes smiled, but rarely laughed, who spoke little, and then with an air of vague weariness and indifference; this was not the little impetuous warm-hearted Madelon he remem-

bered, who had clung to him in her childish sorrow, who had turned from him in her childish anger, who in her very wilfulness, in her very abandonment to the passion of the moment, had been so winning and loveable. It was not merely that she was not gay—gaiety was an idea that he had never associated with Madelon; it had always been a sad little face that had come before him when he had thought of her; but in all her sadness, there had been an animation and spring, an eagerness and effusion in the child, that seemed wholly wanting in the girl. It was as if a subtle shadow had crept over her, toning down every characteristic light to its own grey monotonous tint.

Madelon had not the smallest suspicion of what was passing in her companion's mind. During all these years, in whatever other respects she might have altered, the attitude

of her heart towards him had never changed. What he had always been to her, he was now; the time that had elapsed since they had parted had but intensified and deepened her old feeling towards him—that was all. He had been in her thoughts day and night; in a thousand ways she had worked, she had striven, that he might find her improved when he came home, less ignorant, less unworthy, than the little girl he had parted with. His return had been the one point to which all her hopes had been directed; and, poor child, with a little unconscious egotism, she took it for granted that just then she occupied almost as large a share in Graham's mind as he did in hers. He had always been so good, so kind to her, he must surely be glad to see her again, almost as glad as she was to see him. She, on her side, was ready to go on just where they had left off; and yet now, when for

the first time they were alone together, a sort of shyness had taken possession of her.

She was the first to break the silence, however. "Why do you look at me so?" she said, setting her tea-cup down, and turning to Horace with a sudden smile and blush.

"I am trying to adjust my ideas," he answered, smiling too; "I am trying to reconcile the little Madelon I used to know with this grand young lady I have found here."

"Ah, you will never see that little Madelon again," said the girl, shaking her head rather sorrowfully; "she is gone for ever."

"How is that?" said Graham. "You have grown tall, you wear long gowns, and plait up your hair, I see; but is that a reason——"

"Ah, how can one survive one's old life?" said Madelon plaintively; "one ought not, ought one? All is so changed with me, things are so different, the old days are so utterly gone—I try not to think of them any more; that is the best; and my old self is gone with them, I sometimes think—and that is best too."

She sat leaning forward, staring at the dull red coals; and Graham was silent for a moment.

"Then you have forgotten the old days altogether?" he said at last.

"I never speak of them," she answered slowly; "no, I have not forgotten—it is not in me to forget, I think—but I do not speak of them; of what use? It is like a dream now, that old time, and no one cares for one's dreams but oneself."

"Am I part of the dream too, Madelon? For I think I belong more to that old time

you talk about, which is not so very remote, after all, than to the present. I had a little friend Madelon once, but I feel quite a stranger with this fashionable Miss Linders before me."

"You are laughing at me," said Madelon, opening her eyes wide. "I am not at all fashionable, I think. I don't know what you mean; what should make you think such a thing, Monsieur Horace?"

"Well, your general appearance," he answered. "It suggests balls, fêtes, concerts, operas——"

Madelon shook her head, laughing.

"That is a very deceptive appearance," she said. "Aunt Barbara and I never go anywhere but to classes, and masters, and to a small tea-party occasionally, and to see pictures sometimes."

"But how is that?—does Aunt Barbara not approve of society?"

"Oh yes, but she thinks I—I am not old enough," answered Madelon demurely. "So I am not out yet, and I have not been to a ball since I was ten years old."

"And do you like that sort of thing? It does not sound at all lively," said Graham.

"It is rather dull," replied Madelon simply; "but then I think everything in England is—is *triste*—I beg your pardon," she added quickly, colouring, "I did not mean to complain."

"No, no, I understand. You need not mind what you say to me, Madelon; I want to know what you are doing, what sort of life you are leading, how you get on. So you find England *triste?* In what way?"

"I don't know—not in one way or another—it is everything. There is no life, no movement, no colour, or sunshine—yes, the sun shines, of course, but it is different. Ah, Monsieur Horace, you who have just

come back to it, do you not understand what I mean?"

"I think I do in a way; but then, you know, coming to England is coming home to me, Madelon, and that makes a great difference."

"Yes, that makes a great difference; England can never be home to me, I think. I will tell you, Monsieur Horace—yesterday at that Exhibition I went to with Aunt Barbara, you know, I saw a picture; it was an Italian scene, quite small, only a white wall with a vine growing over the top, and a bit of blue sky, and a beggar-boy asleep in the shade. One has seen the same thing a hundred times before, but this one looked so bright, so hot, so sunny, it gave me such a longing—such a longing——"

She started up, and walked once or twice up and down the room. In a moment she came back, and went on hurriedly:

"You ask me if I have forgotten the past, Monsieur Horace. I think of it always—always. I cannot like England, and English life. Aunt Barbara will not let me speak of it, and I try to forget it when she is by, but I cannot. Aunt Barbara is very kind—kinder than you can imagine—it is not that; but I weary of it all so. When we walk in the park, or sit here in the evening, reading, I am thinking of all the beautiful places there are in the world; of all the great things to be done, of all that people are seeing, and doing, and enjoying. I wish I could get away, I wish I could go anywhere—if I could run away—I have a voice, I could sing, I could make money enough to live upon. I think I should have done so, Monsieur Horace, if I had not known you were coming home. Yes, if I could run away somewhere, where I could breathe —be free——"

"You must never do that," cried Graham hastily—he was standing opposite to her now, with his back to the fire; "you don't know what you are saying, Madelon. Promise me that you will not think of it even."

"I was talking nonsense, I don't suppose I meant it really," she answered; "I could not do it, you know; but I promise all the same, as you wish it."

"And you always keep your promises, I know," said Graham, smiling at her.

"Ah, do not," she cried, suddenly covering her face with her hands, "don't speak of that, Monsieur Horace—I know now—ah, yes, I understand what you must have thought—but I did not then; indeed I was only a child then, I did not know what I was doing."

"I don't think you are much more than a child now," said Graham, taking one of her

hands in his; "you are not much altered, after all, Madelon."

"Am I not?" she said. "But I have tried to improve; I have worked very hard, I thought it would please you, and that you would be glad to find me different—and I am different," she added, with a sudden pathetic change in her voice. "I understand a great deal now that I never thought of before; I think of the old life, but it is not all with pleasure, and I know why Aunt Barbara—and yet I do love it so much, and you are a part of it, Monsieur Horace—when you speak your voice seems to bring it back; and you call me Madelon—no one else calls me Madelon—" Her voice broke down.

"You are not happy, my dear little girl," said Graham in his old kind way, and trying to laugh off her emotion. "I shall have to prescribe for you. What shall it

be?—a course of balls and theatres? What would Aunt Barbara say to that?"

"She would not employ you for a doctor again, I think," said Madelon smiling. "No, I am not unhappy, Monsieur Horace—only dull sometimes; and Aunt Barbara would say, that is on account of my foreign education. I know she thinks all foreigners frivolous and ill-educated; I have heard her say so."

When Madelon went to her room that night, she sat long over her fire, pondering, girl-fashion, on her talk with Horace Graham. The tones of his voice were still ringing in her ears; she seemed still to see his kind look, to feel the friendly grasp of his hand; and as she thought of him, her familiar little bedroom, with its white-curtained bed, and pictured walls, and well-filled bookshelves, seemed to vanish, and she saw herself again, a desolate child, sitting at the

window of the Paris hotel that hot August night her father died, weeping behind the convent grating, crouched on the damp earth in the dark avenues of the Promenade à Sept Heures. He had not changed in all these years, she thought, he had come back kind and good as ever, to be her friend and protector, as he had always been; and he had said she was not altered much either, and yet she was—ah! so altered from the unconscious, unthinking, ignorant child he had left. She began to pace up and down the room, where indeed she had spent many a wakeful night before now, thinking, reflecting, reasoning, trying to make out the clue to her old life—striving to reconcile it with the new life around her—not too successfully on the whole. How was it she had first discovered the want of harmony between them? How was it she had first learnt to appreciate the gulf that separated

the experiences of her first years, from the pure, peaceful life she was leading now? She could hardly have told; no one had revealed it to her, no one had spoken of it; but in a thousand unconsidered ways—in talk, in books, in the unconscious influences of her every-day surroundings, she had come to understand the true meaning of her father's life, and to know that the memory of these early days, that she had found so bright and happy, was something never to be spoken of, to be hidden away—a disgrace to her, even, perhaps. Aunt Barbara never would let her talk of them, would have blotted them out, if possible; she had wondered why at first—she understood well enough now, and resented the enforced silence. She only cherished the thought of them, and of her father the more; she only clung to her old love for him the more desperately, because it must be in secret; and

she longed at times, with a sad, inexpressible yearning, for something of the old brightness that had died out one mournful night nearly eight years ago, when she had talked with her father for the last time.

"I think I must be a hundred years old," the girl would say to herself sometimes, after returning from one of those little parties of which she had spoken to Graham, where she had spent the evening in the company of a dozen other young ladies of her own age, all white muslin and sash-ribbons. "These girls, how tiresome they all are!—how they chatter and laugh, and what silly jokes they make! How can it amuse them? But they are still in the school-room, as Aunt Barbara is always telling me; and before that, they were all in the nursery, I suppose; they do not know anything about life; their only experiences concern nurses and governesses; whilst I—I—ah! is it

possible I am no older than they are?"

She would lean her arms on the window-sill, and look out on the midnight sky; the Abbey chimes would ring out over the great city, overhead the stars would be shining perhaps, but down below, between the trees in the park, a great glare would show where a million lamps were keeping watch till dawn. Shall we blame our Madelon, if she sometimes looked away from the stars, and down upon the glare that brightened far up into the dark sky? All the young blood was throbbing and stirring in her veins with such energy and vigour; the world was so wide, so wide, the circle around her so narrow, and in that bright, misty past, which, after all, she only half understood, were to be found so many precedents for possibilities that might still be hidden in the future. Shall we blame her, if, in her youthful belief in happiness as the

chief good, her youthful impatience of peace, and calm, and rest, she longed with a great longing for movement, change, excitement? Outside, as it seemed to her, in her vague young imagination, such a free, glorious life was going on—and she had no part in it! As she stood at her window, the distant, ceaseless roar of the street traffic would sound to her, in the stillness of the night, like the beat of the great waves of life that for ever broke and receded, before they could touch the weary spot where she stood spell-bound in isolation. And through it all she said to herself, "When Monsieur Horace comes home,"—and now Monsieur Horace had come, would he do anything to help her?

Graham, indeed, was willing enough to do what he could for her; and before he went to bed that night he wrote the following letter to his sister, Mrs. Vavasour:

"My dear Georgie,

"The butter and eggs arrived in safety, and Aunt Barbara declared herself much pleased with your hamper of country produce; but you will, no doubt, have heard from her before this. She is looking wonderfully well, and not a day older than when I left England. As for Madeleine Linders, I hardly recognized her, she is so grown and so much improved. I find I have at least a fortnight's business in London, and then I will run down to you for another visit, if I may. Would it put you out very much if I brought Madeleine with me for a time? I should like you and her to know each other, and a change would do her good. Aunt Barbara seems to have been giving her a high-pressure education, with no fun to counterbalance it, and the poor child finds it horribly dull work; and no wonder—I know I should be

sorry to go through it myself. A few weeks with you and the children would brighten her up, and do her all the good in the world. Let me know what you think of it.

"Ever yours,

"HORACE GRAHAM."

CHAPTER III.

AT ASHURST.

IT was two days after Graham's talk with Madelon, that some people of whom mention has once or twice been made in this little history, were sitting chatting together as they drank their afternoon tea in Mrs. Vavasour's drawing-room at Ashhurst, a low, dark-panelled, chintz-furnished room, with an ever-pervading scent of dried rose-leaves, and fresh flowers, and with long windows opening on to the little lawn, all shut in with trees and shrubberies. Mrs. Vavasour, who sat by the fire knitting, was a calm, silent, gentle-looking woman, with smooth,

fair hair under her lace cap, and those pathetic lines we sometimes see in the faces of those who through circumstances, or natural temperament, have achieved contentment through the disappointments of life, rather than through its fulfilled hopes. She was the mother of many children, of whom the elder half was already dispersed—one was married, one dead, one in India, and one at sea; of those still at home, the eldest, Madge, an honest, sturdy, square-faced child of eleven or twelve, was in the room now, handing about tea-cups and bread-and-butter. Dr. Vavasour was a big, white-haired man, many years older than his wife, who had married him when she was only seventeen; he was a clever man, and a popular doctor, and having just come in from a twenty miles' drive through March winds and rain, was standing with his back to the mantelpiece, with an air of having thoroughly earned

warmth and repose. He was discussing parish matters with Mr. Morris the curate, who was sitting at the small round table where Maria Leslie, a tall, rosy, good-humoured-looking young woman of five or six-and-twenty, was pouring out the tea.

"If the Rector is on your side, Morris," said the Doctor, "of course I can say nothing; only I can tell you this, you will lose me. I will have nothing to do with your new-fangled notions; I have said my prayers after the same fashion for the last sixty years, and as sure as you begin to sing-song them, instead of reading them, I give up my pew, and go off to church at C., with my wife and family."

"Not with Miss Leslie, I trust, Doctor," said the Curate; "we could not get on without Miss Leslie, to lead the singing."

"Miss Leslie does as she likes, and if she prefers sham singing to honest reading, that's

her concern not mine. But I tell you plainly, sir, I am an old-fashioned man, and have no patience with all these changes. I have a great mind to see if I can't get made churchwarden, and try the effect of a little counter irritation. Madge, my child, bring me a cup of tea."

"I hope *you* do not hold these opinions, Miss Leslie," said the Curate, in an under tone to Maria Leslie; "we could not afford to lose you from amongst us; you must not desert us."

"Oh no, I could not give up my Ashurst Sundays," answers Maria, fidgeting amongst her cups and saucers; "I have too many interests here, the schools, and the church—and the preaching—not that the Rector's sermons are always very lively; and then I like chanting and intoning."

"And can you not convert the Doctor?"

"I think that would be impossible; Dr.

Vavasour always holds to his own opinions. Will you have some more tea?"

"No more, thank you. I should have thought, Miss Leslie, you might have converted any one; I cannot fancy any arguments you might use being other than irresistible."

"Mr. Morris," said Mrs. Vavasour, breaking in upon this little tête-à-tête, "have you seen those curious spiders that my brother brought home from South America? You might fetch Uncle Horace's case, Madge, and show them to Mr. Morris; they are worth looking at, I assure you."

An hour later this little party had dispersed. Mr. Morris had taken leave, Maria had gone to dress for dinner, Madge to her school-room; Dr. Vavasour and his wife were left alone.

"I had a letter from Horace this afternoon," she said, taking it out of her pocket,

and giving it to the Doctor to read. "What do you say to our having Miss Linders here for a time? I have often thought of asking her, and this will be a good opportunity. Do you object?"

"Not in the least, my dear; she is some sort of a cousin of yours, is she not?"

"A remote one," said Mrs. Vavasour, smiling. "However, I am very willing to make her acquaintance, especially if the poor girl wants a change. I agree with Horace, that a too prolonged course of Aunt Barbara must be trying."

"Why, I thought Mrs. Treherne was everything that is perfect and admirable; she has never troubled us much with her society, but I am sure I understood from you——"

"So she is," said his wife interrupting him; "that is just it—Aunt Barbara is quite perfect, a kind of ideal gentlewoman in cul-

tivation and refinement, and piety, and everything else; but she is, without exception, the most alarming person I know."

"Well, let Miss Linders come by all means," repeated the Doctor. "Isn't it nearly dinner-time? I am starving. I have been twenty miles round the country today, and when I come in I find that long-legged fellow Morris philandering away, and have to listen to his vacuous nonsense for an hour. Whatever brings him here so often? He ought to have something better to do with his time than to be idling it away over afternoon tea. Is he looking after Madge?"

"Poor little Madge!" answered Mrs. Vavasour, laughing. "No, I wish I could think Mr. Morris had nothing more serious on hand, but it is much more likely to be Maria."

"Maria!" cried the Doctor; "is that what

the man is up to? But surely he knows she is engaged to Horace."

"Indeed I much doubt it," Mrs. Vavasour answered; "the engagement was to be a secret, and I am not aware that any one knows of it but ourselves, and Aunt Barbara—and Miss Linders, probably—and if Maria will not enlighten Mr. Morris as to how matters stand, I do not see what any one else can do."

"Then Molly is very much to blame; and I have a great mind to tell her so."

"I think you had better let things take their own course," said Mrs. Vavasour. "Maria is quite old enough to know what she is about, and Horace will be down here in a few days, to look after his own interests."

"Well, but—bless my soul!" cried the Doctor, "I can't make it out at all. Do you mean that Maria is allowing this fellow

Morris's attentions? I thought she and Graham were devoted to each other, and had been for the last five years?"

"I think they thought they were, five years ago, when Horace, fresh home from the Crimea, was all the heroes in the world in Molly's eyes; and he was just in the mood to fall in love with the first pretty bright girl he saw. But all that was over long ago, and in these five years they have grown utterly apart."

"Then the sooner they grow together again the better," said the Doctor.

"I don't believe it is possible," answered his wife. "I don't see how they can ever pull together; they have different tastes, different aims, different ideas on every conceivable subject. I am very fond of Molly; she is an excellent, good girl in her way, but it is not the way that will fit her to become Horace's wife. She will weary him,

and he will—not neglect her, he would never be unkind to a woman—but he will not be the husband she deserves to have. For my part, I think it will be a thousand pities, if a mistaken sense of honour makes them hold to their engagement."

"That may be all very well for Horace," said the Doctor, "but what about Molly? When a girl has been looking forward to marrying, and having a house of her own, it is not so pleasant for her to have all her prospects destroyed."

"Then she can marry Mr. Morris if she pleases."

"Indeed! Well, if Maria's mistaken sense of honour does not stand in the way of a flirtation with Morris, I shall be much astonished if Horace's does not make itself felt one way or another. However, it is no concern of mine; manage it your own way."

"Indeed I have no intention of interfering," said Mrs. Vavasour. "I can imagine nothing more useless, especially as Horace will be here in less than a fortnight. But I will write to-night to Aunt Barbara about Miss Linders."

"Oh, yes, ask Miss Linders down here, by all means; and if Morris would only fall in love with her, that might settle all difficulties; but I suppose there is not much chance of that." And so saying, the Doctor went to dress for dinner.

It was a new world, this, in which our Madelon found herself, after the still leisure of her home in Cornwall, with its outlook on rocks, and sea, and sky, after the unbroken regularity of her London life, with its ever recurring round of fixed employments—a new world, this sheltered English village, lying amongst woods, and fields, and pastures, divided by trim brown hedges,

whose every twig was studded with red March buds, and beneath which late March primroses were blowing—and a new world, too, the varied life of this bright, cheerful house, where people were for ever coming and going, and where children's footsteps were pattering, and children's voices and laughter ringing all day long.

It was with the children especially that Madelon made friends in the early days of her visit. From Mrs. Vavasour she had the kindliest welcome; but the mistress of this busy household had a thousand things to attend to, that left her but little time to bestow on her guest. She had deputed Maria Leslie to entertain Madelon; but Maria also had her own business—school-teaching, cottage-visiting in the village; nor, in truth, even when the two were in each other's society, did they find much to say to each other. It had never been a secret to Madelon that

Graham was engaged to Maria Leslie, and the girl had looked forward, perhaps, to making friends with the woman who was accounted worthy of the honour of being Monsieur Horace's wife; but, the very first day, she had turned away disappointed. There was, both instinctively felt, no common ground on which they could meet and speak a common language intelligible to both; memories, interests, tastes, all lay too wide apart; and as for those larger human sympathies which, wider and deeper than language can express, make themselves felt and understood without its medium, something forbade their touching upon them at all. There was from the first, a certain coolness and absence of friendliness in Maria's manner, which was quite at variance with her usual good-humoured amiability, and which Madelon felt, but did not understand. She could not guess that it was the expression of a vague

jealousy in Maria's mind, excited by Madelon's beauty, and graciousness of air and manner, and by a knowledge of her past relations with Horace Graham; Maria would hardly have acknowledged it to herself, but it raised an impassable barrier between these two.

As for Graham, no one saw much of him. He was shut up all day in his brother-in-law's study, writing, copying notes, sorting and arranging specimens, preparing the book that was to come out in the course of the next season; and, when he did appear, at breakfast or dinner, he was apt to be silent and moody, rarely exchanging more than a few words with any one. Madelon wondered sometimes at this taciturn Monsieur Horace, so different from the one she had always known; though, indeed, in speaking to her the old kindly light would always come back to his eyes, the old friendly tones to

his voice. But, like every one else, she saw but little of him; and, in fact, Graham in these days, a grim, melancholy, silent man, brooding over his own thoughts, his own hopes, plans, disappointments perhaps, was no very lively addition to a family party.

There was one small person, however, whom our Madelon at once inspired with a quite unbounded admiration for her. A few evenings after her arrival, some one knocked at her bedroom door as she was dressing for dinner; she opened it, and there stood Madge in the passage, her hands full of red and white daisies.

"I have brought you some flowers, Cousin Madelon," said the child shyly.

"They are beautiful," said Madelon, taking them from her; "won't you come in? I will put some of them in my hair."

She sat down before the looking-glass and

began arranging them in her hair, whilst Madge stood and watched her with wide-open eyes.

"They are out of my own garden," she said presently.

"I might have guessed that, they are so pretty," said Madelon turning round, and smiling at her; it was in the girl's nature to make these little gracious speeches, which came to her more readily than ordinary words of thanks. "I like them very much," she went on, "they remind me of some that grew in the convent garden."

"Were you ever in a convent?" asked Madge with a certain awe.

"Yes, for two years, when I was about as old as you are."

"And were there any nuns there?" asked Madge, whose ideas were not enlarged, and who looked upon a nun as the embodiment of much romance.

"To be sure," answered Madelon, rather amused, "they were all nuns, except some little girls who came every day to be taught by them."

"Then you were at school there?" said Madge.

"Not exactly; my aunt was the—what do you call it?—Lady Superior of the convent; that was why I went there."

"And did you like it?" enquired Madge, who was apparently of opinion that such an opportunity for gaining exceptional information should not be wasted.

"I don't know," answered Madelon; "I don't think I did at the time; I used to find it very dull, and I often longed to be away. But the nuns were very kind to me; and it is pleasant to look back upon, so quiet and peaceful. I think we don't always know when and where we are happy," she added, with a little sigh.

She sat leaning against the table, her head resting on her hand, thinking over the past —as she was for ever thinking of the past now, poor child! How sad, how weary they had been, those years in the convent— yes, she knew that she had found them so— and yet how peaceful, how innocent, how sheltered! Reading her past life in the new light that every day made its shadows darker, she knew that those years were the only ones of her childhood which she could look back upon, without the sudden pang that would come with the memory of those others which she had found so happy then, but which she knew now were—what? Ah, something so different from what she had once imagined! But as for those days at the convent, they came back to her, softened by the kindly haze of time, with the strangest sense of restfulness and security, utterly at variance, one would say, with the restless

longing with which she looked out on the world of action—and yet not wholly inconsistent with it perhaps, after all. Did she indeed know when and where she would be happy?

Madge, meanwhile, stood and looked at her. She had fairly fallen in love with this new cousin of hers; her beauty, and gracious ways, her foreign accent, and now her experiences of nuns and convents, had come like a revelation to the little English girl in her downright, everyday life. With a comical incongruity, she could compare her in her own mind to nothing but an enchanted princess in some fairy-tale; and she stood gazing first at her and then at the glass, where soft wavy brown hair and red and white daisies were reflected.

"What are you thinking of?" said Madelon, looking up suddenly.

"I—I don't know," replied Madge, quite

taken aback, colouring and stammering; and then, as if she could not help it—"Oh! Cousin Madelon, you are so pretty."

"It is very pretty of you to say so," said Madelon, laughing and blushing too a little; then holding out both hands she drew Madge towards her, and kissed her on her two cheeks. "I think you and I will be great friends, will we not?" she said.

"Yes," says unresponsive Madge shortly, looking down and twisting her fingers in her awkward English fashion.

"I would like you to be fond of me," continued Madelon, "for I think I shall love you very much; and I like you to call me Madelon—nobody else calls me so—except—except your uncle Horace."

"It was Uncle Horace told me to," cried Madge. "I asked him what I should call you, and he said he thought Cousin Madelon would do."

"I think it will do very well," said Madelon rising. "To-morrow will you take me to your garden? I should like to see your daisies growing."

After this Madge and Madelon became great friends; and when the former was at her lessons, there was a nurseryful of of younger children to pet and play with, if Madelon felt so disposed. Sometimes in the morning when she was sitting alone in the drawing-room, little feet would go scampering along the floor upstairs, shrill little voices would make themselves heard from above, and then Madelon, throwing down book or work, would run up to the big nursery, where, whilst the two elder children were in the school-room with their mother, three round, rosy children kept up a perpetual uproar. It was quite a new sensation to our lonely Madelon to have these small things to caress, and romp with,

and fondle, and she felt that it was a moment of triumph when they had learnt to greet her entrance with a shout of joy. Down on the floor she would go, and be surrounded in a moment, with petitions for a game, a story, a ride.

Graham came up one day in the midst of a most uproarious romp. "Nurse," he said, putting his head in at the door, "I do wish you would keep these children quiet—" and stopped as suddenly as the noise had stopped at his appearance. Madelon, all blushing and confused, was standing with the youngest boy riding on her back, whilst the little girls, Lina and Kate, were holding on to her skirts behind; they had pulled down all her hair, and it was hanging in loose waves over her shoulders.

"I beg your pardon, Madelon," said Graham, coming in, and smiling at her confusion. "I had no idea that you were here,

and the instigator of all this uproar; where is nurse? I shall have to ask her to keep you all in order together."

"Nurse has gone downstairs to do some ironing," says Lina. "Oh, Uncle Horace, we were having such fun with Cousin Madelon."

"Uncle Horace, will you give me a ride? You give better rides than Cousin Madelon," cries Jack, slipping down on to the ground.

"Uncle Horace, Cousin Madelon has been telling us about South America, and we have been hunting buffaloes."

"I am sorry," says Madelon; "I quite forgot how busy you are, Monsieur Horace, and that you could hear all our noise. We will be quieter for the future, and not hunt buffaloes just over your head."

He looked at her without answering; there was a flush on her pale cheeks under

the shadow of the heavy waves of hair, a smile in her eyes as she looked at him with one of her old, shy, childish glances, as if not quite sure how he would take her apology. He could not help smiling in answer, then laughed outright, and turned away abruptly.

"Come here, then, Jack, and I will give you a ride," he said, lifting the boy on to his shoulder. "This is the way we hunt buffaloes."

Half-an-hour later, Maria, just come in from the village, looked into the nursery, attracted by the shouts and laughter. "It is really very odd," she said afterwards to Mrs. Vavasour, in a somewhat aggrieved tone, "that when Horace always declares he cannot find time to walk with me, or even to talk to me, he should spend half his mornings romping with the children in the nursery." And Mrs. Vavasour, who had

also gone upstairs with Madge and Harry when they had finished their lessons, had not much to say in answer.

CHAPTER IV.

ICH KANN NICHT HIN!

ONE day, Madelon said to Mrs. Vavasour, "Please let me have all the children for a walk this afternoon."

"What, all! my dear girl," said Mrs. Vavasour; "you don't know what you are undertaking."

"Oh yes, I do," Madelon answered, smiling; "they will be very good, I know, and Madge will help me."

So they all set out for their walk, through the garden, and out at the gate that led at once into the fields which stretched beyond.

They walked one by one along the narrow track between the springing corn, a little flock of brown-holland children, and Madelon last of all, in her fresh grey spring dress. Harry had a drum, and marched on in front, drubbing with all his might; and Jack followed, brandishing a sword, and blowing a tin trumpet. Madge would have stopped this horrible din, which indeed scared away the birds to right and left, but Madelon only laughed and said she liked it.

Graham coming across the fields in another direction, saw the little procession advancing towards him, and waited on the other side of a stile till it should come up. The children tumbled joyfully over into Uncle Horace's arms, and were at once ready with a hundred plans for profiting by the unwonted pleasure of having him for a companion in their walk; but he distinctly declined all their propositions, and sending

them on in front with Madge, walked along at Madelon's side.

"Why do you plague yourself with all these children," he said, "instead of taking a peaceable walk in peaceable society?"

"I like the children," she answered, "and I should have found no society but my own this afternoon, for Mrs. Vavasour was going to pay visits, she said, and Maria went out directly after lunch."

"And you think your own society would have been less peaceable than that of these noisy little ruffians?"

"I don't know," she answered; "I like walking by myself very much sometimes, but I like the children too, and Madge and I are great friends."

"I think Madge shows her sense—she and I are great friends, too," said Graham laughing.

"Madge thinks there is no one in the

world like Uncle Horace—she is always talking about you," said Madelon shyly.

"That is strange—to me she is always talking about you—she looks upon you as a sort of fairy Princess, I believe, who has lived in a charmed world as strange to her as any she reads about in story books. Madge's experiences are limited, and it does not take much to set her little brain working. If Maria and I are abroad next winter, I think I must get Georgie to spare her to me for a time."

"Are you going abroad again?" said Madelon; and as she asked the question, a chill shadow seemed to fall upon the bright spring landscape.

"It is possible—I have heard of an opening."

He paused for a moment, and then went on—

"I don't know why I should not tell you

all about it, Madelon, though I have said nothing about it to anyone yet—but it will be no secret. I had a letter this morning telling me that there is an opening for a physician at L.—that small place on the Mediterranean, you know, that has come so much into fashion lately as a winter place for invalids. Dr. B—, an old friend of mine, who is there now, is going to leave it, and he has written to give me the first offer of being his successor."

"And shall you go?" asked Madelon.

"Well, I should like it well enough for a good many reasons, for the next two or three years, at any rate. It is a lovely place, a good climate, and I should not feel myself tied down if anything else turned up that suited me better; but there are other considerations—in fact, I cannot decide without thinking it well over."

"But at any rate you would not go there

till next winter, would you?" said Madelon, with a tremor in her voice which she vainly tried to conceal.

"Not to stop; but if I accept this offer, I should go out immediately for a week or two, so as to get introduced to B——'s patients before they leave. A good many will be returning next winter probably, and it would be as well for me, as a matter of business, to make their acquaintance; you understand?"

"Yes, I understand—but then you would have to go at once, Monsieur Horace, for it is already April, and the weather is so warm that people will be coming away. I remember how they used to fly from Nice and Florence—every one that we knew—as soon as it began to get hot."

"Yes, I have not much time to lose, and if I decide to go at all, I shall start at once. But it is very doubtful."

They had reached the end of the field whilst talking; a heavy gate separated it from a lane beyond, and the children, unable to open it, had dispersed here and there along the bank, hunting for primroses.

"Shall we go on?" said Graham, "or would you like to turn back now? You look tired."

Madelon did not answer; what was the use of going on? What did it matter? Everything came to the same end at last—a sense of utter discouragement and weariness had seized her, and she stood leaning against the gate, staring blankly down the road before her. There were about twenty yards of shady, grassy lane, and then it was divided by a cross-road, with a cottage standing at one of the angles. Graham, who was looking at Madelon, saw her face change suddenly.

"Why, there are——" she began, and

then stopped abruptly, colouring with confusion.

Graham looked; two figures had just appeared from one of the cross-roads, and, walking slowly forward, had paused in front of the cottage; they were Mr. Morris the curate, and Maria Leslie. The clergyman stood with his back to Graham and Madelon, but they could see Maria with her handkerchief to her eyes, apparently weeping bitterly. The curate was holding one of her hands in both his, and so they stood together for a moment, till he raised it to his lips. Then she pulled it away vehemently, and burying her face completely in her handkerchief, hurried off in a direction opposite to that by which she had come. Mr. Morris stood gazing after her for a moment, and then he also disappeared, within the cottage.

This little scene passed so rapidly, that

the two looking on, had hardly time to realize that they were looking on, before it was all over. There was a sort of pause. Madelon gave one glance at Graham, and turned away—then the children came running up with their primroses. "Here are some for you, Uncle Horace; Cousin Madelon, please may I put some in your hat?"

Madelon took off her hat, and stooped down to help Madge arrange the flowers; she would not try to understand the meaning of what they had just witnessed, nor to interpret Monsieur Horace's look.

"You are going home," said Graham, unfastening the gate without looking at her; "then we part company here; I have to go further." And without another word he strode off, leaving the children disconcerted and rebellious at this abrupt termination of their walk.

"Madge," said Madelon, caressing the

little square perplexed face, "you won't mind having a short walk to-day, will you? Let us go home now, and we will play in the garden till your tea-time," and wise little Madge agreed without further demur.

It was on the evening of the same day that Madelon, coming in from the garden where she had been wandering about in the twilight, found Horace discussing his plans with Mrs. Vavasour, who was making tea. She would have gone away again, but Graham called her back, and went on talking to his sister.

"I must send an answer as soon as possible," he was saying; "I can't keep B—— waiting for a month while I am making up my mind; I will speak to Maria this evening."

"It would be as well," answered Mrs. Vavasour; "she ought to be told at once. But must an answer be sent immediately?

I think you will see that it will be useless to hurry Maria for a decision; she will want time for consideration."

"She shall have any reasonable time," he replied shortly; "but that is why I shall speak at once—she can think it over."

"And if you have in a measure made up your own mind," continued his sister, "she will be better pleased, I am sure; she will wish in some sort to be guided by your wishes."

"That is just what I am anxious to avoid," he answered impatiently. "I do not desire to influence her in any way; I would not for the world that she should make any sacrifice on my account, and then be miserable for ever after."

"My dear Horace, you do not suppose Maria——"

"My dear Georgie, I know what Maria

is, and you must allow me to take my own way."

He began to stride up and down the room with his hands in his pockets, Madelon watching him in silence. Presently he began again.

"I know what Molly is; if she imagined that I wanted to go to this place, she would say 'Go,' without thinking of herself for a moment; but ten to one, when we got there, she would be for ever regretting England, and hating the society, and the mode of life, and everything, and everybody; and it would be very natural—she has never been abroad, and knows nothing of foreign life and manners."

"Then you do not mean to go?" said Mrs. Vavasour.

"I have not said so," he answered—"I shall put the matter calmly before Maria; tell her what I think are the reasons for and

against, and leave her to decide. I suppose she cannot complain of that."

"I do not imagine for a moment she will complain," replied Mrs. Vavasour; "but I think she will want your judgment to help her."

He only muttered something in answer to this; and Madelon asked in a low voice, "Is it about going abroad, that Monsieur Horace is doubting?"

"Yes, he told you about it, did he not?" said Mrs. Vavasour. "I hope he may decide to go—it would be the very thing for him."

"Do you think so?" said Graham, who had overheard this last remark; and turning to Madelon with rather a melancholy smile, "Listen to the description, Madelon, and tell me what you think of it—a little town on the shores of the Mediterranean, sheltered on every side by hills, so that all the winter

is spring, and flowers bloom all the year round. The gardens are full of pomegranate and orange trees, and the hills are terraced with vineyards, and covered with olives and chestnuts everywhere else. Do you think that that sounds inviting?"

"A great deal too good to be true," said Mrs. Vavasour, laughing. "I never believe thoroughly in these earthly paradises." But Madelon did not laugh; her eyes lighted up, her cheeks glowed.

"Ah!" she cried, "I can imagine all that. I believe in such places; they exist somewhere in the world, but one cannot get to them."

"One can sometimes," said Graham; "for perhaps Maria and I are going to this one, and then you had better become an invalid as fast as possible, Madelon, that Aunt Barbara may bring you there too."

"And you are really going?" she asked,

with a sad, sick feeling at her heart.

"Perhaps," he said; "we shall see what Maria says. I am afraid she may not take the same view of it all that you do;" and Maria, coming in at that moment, the conversation dropped.

After tea they were all sitting, as usual, in the drawing-room; a wood fire burnt and crackled on the low hearth, but the evening was warm, and the long windows were open to the lawn, where Graham was walking up and down, smoking a pipe. Dr. Vavasour was dozing in an arm-chair, Mrs. Vavasour sat at the table stitching, Maria in the shade knitting cotton socks, and Madelon was leaning back in her chair, the lamplight falling on her brown hair and white dress, a piece of embroidery between her fingers, but her hands lying in her lap, and such sad thoughts in her poor little weary head. So this was the end of it all? Monsieur Horace was

going to be married, and then live abroad —yes, she was certain he would live abroad —who would stay in England if they could help it?—and she would never, never see him again! The one thought revolved in her brain with a sort of dull weariness, which prevented her seizing more than half its meaning, but which only required a touch to startle it into acutest pain. No one spoke or moved, and this oppressive silence of a room full of people seemed to perplex her as with a sense of unreality, and was more distracting for the moment than would have been the confusion of a dozen tongues around her.

Presently, however, Graham came in from the garden, and walked straight up to her.

"Will you not sing something?" he said.

She rose at once, without speaking or raising her eyes, and went to the piano.

"What shall I sing?" she said then, turning over her music.

"Anything—it does not matter," said Graham, who had followed her; "never mind your music—sing the first thing that comes into your head."

She considered for a moment, and then began.

When Madelon sang, her hearers could not choose but listen; in other matters she had very sufficient abilities, but in singing she rose to genius. Gifted by nature with a superb voice, an exceptional musical talent, these had been carefully cultivated during the last two or three years, and the result was an art that was no art, a noble and simple style, which gave an added intensity to her natural powers of expression, and forbade every suspicion of affectation. As she sang now, the doctor roused up from his doze, and Mrs. Vavasour dropped her

work; only Maria Leslie, sitting in the shadow of the window-curtain, knitted on with increased assiduity.

It was a German song, Schumann's "Sehnsucht," that she was singing; it was the first that had come to her mind at Graham's bidding, and, still preoccupied, she began it almost without thought of the words and sentiment; but she had not sung two lines, when some hidden emotion made itself felt in her voice with a quite irresistible enthusiasm and pathos. These were the words:—

"Ich blick' in mein Herz, und ich blick' in die Welt,
Bis vom schwimmenden Auge die Thräne mir fällt:
Wohl leuchtet die Ferne mit goldenem Licht,
Doch hält mich der Nord, ich erreiche sie nicht.
O die Schranken so eng, und die Welt so weit!
Und so flüchtig die Zeit, und so flüchtig die Zeit.

Ich weiss ein Land, wo aus sonnigem Grün
Um versunkene Tempel die Tranben blühn,
Wo die purpurne Woge das Ufer besaümt,
Und von kommenden Sängern der Lorbeer traümt;
Fern lockt es und winkt dem verlangenden Sinn,
Und ich kann nicht hin—kann nicht hin!"

As Madelon sang these last words she looked up, and her eyes met Graham's, as he stood leaning against the piano, gazing at her face. She blushed scarlet, and stopped suddenly.

"I—I don't think I can sing any more," she said, letting her hands fall from the keys into her lap. She turned round, and saw Maria looking at her also, watching her and Graham perhaps. "How hot it is!" she cried, pushing the hair off her forehead with a little impatient gesture. "*Je m'étouffe ici!*" And she jumped up quickly and ran out of the room.

Out of the atmosphere of love, and suspicion, and jealousy that was stifling her, into the hall, up the shallow staircase to the long matted passage which ran the length of the house, the bed-rooms opening on to it on either side. Madelon paced it rapidly for some minutes, then opened a door at the

end, and entered the nursery. Nothing stifling here; a large, cool, airy room, with white blinds drawn down, subduing the full moonlight to a soft gloom, in which one could discern two little beds, each with its small occupant, whose regular breathing told that they had done, for ever, with the cares and sorrows of at least that day.

Madelon stood looking at them, the excitement that had made her cheeks burn, and her pulses throb, subsiding gradually in presence of this subdued unconscious life. She smoothed the sheets and counterpane of one little sleeper, who, with bare limbs tossed about, was lying right across the bed, all the careful tuckings-up wofully disarranged; and then, passing on, went into an inner room, that opened out of the larger nursery. The window was open here to the cool, grey sky, the moonlight shining in on the white

curtains, the little white bed at the further end.

"Is that you, Cousin Madelon?" says Madge, raising a brown, shaggy head as Madelon softly opened the door. "Won't you come in, please? I am not asleep."

Madelon came in, and went to the window. It looked down upon the lawn, with the still tree-shadows lying across it, and some other shadows that were not still—those of two people walking up and down, talking earnestly. She could distinguish Monsieur Horace's voice, and then Maria's in answer, and then Monsieur Horace again, and a sudden pang seemed to seize the poor child's heart, and hold it tight in its grasp. How happy they were, those two, talking together down there, whilst she was all alone up here, looking on.

"Do come here, Cousin Madelon," said Madge's impatient voice from the bed. "I

want you to tuck me up, and give me a kiss."

Madelon went up to the bed, and kneeling down by it, laid her cheek wearily by Madge's on the pillow. The child passed her arm round her neck, and hugged her tight, and the innocent, loving caress soothed the girl's sore heart, for the moment, more than anything else could have done.

"Little Madge," she said, drawing the child closer to her, as if the pressure of the little, soft, warm limbs had power to stop the aching at her heart. "Oh! Madge, I wish I were no bigger and no older than you. One is happier so."

"Do you?" said Madge, wondering. "I should like to be grown up, as tall and beautiful as you are, and to sing like you. You were singing just now downstairs; I opened the window, and could hear you quite plainly; why did you stop so soon?"

"It was hot," said Madelon, her face

flushing up again at the recollection; "and one is not always in the mood for singing, you know, Madge."

"Ah, but do sing me just one song, now, Cousin Madelon—just here, before I go to sleep."

Still kneeling, with Madge's head nestling on her shoulder, Madelon began to sing a little half-gay, half-melancholy French romance of many verses. The tune seemed to grow more and more plaintive as it went on, a pathetic, monotonous chant, rising and falling. Before it was ended, Madge's hold had relaxed, her eyes were closed—she was sound asleep for the night. Madelon rose gently, kissed the honest, rosy, freckled face; and then, as if drawn by some invincible attraction, went back to the window.

Yes, they were still there, those two, not walking up and down now, but standing

under the big tree at the end of the lawn, still talking, as she could see by their gestures. "Ah, how happy they are," thinks our Madelon again, forgetting the scene of the afternoon, her doubts, her half-formed suspicions—how happy they must be, Monsieur Horace, who loves Maria, Maria who is loved by Monsieur Horace, whilst she—why, it is she who loves Monsieur Horace, who has loved him since he rescued her, a little child, from loneliness and despair—she, who for all these years has had but one thought, Monsieur Horace, one object, Monsieur Horace, and who sees herself now shut out from such a bright, gleaming paradise, into such shivering outer darkness. Ah, she loved him—she loved him—she owned it to herself now, with a sudden burst of passion—and he was going away; he had no thought of her; his path in life lay along one road, and hers along another—a road how blank,

how dreary, wrapped in what grey unswerving mists.

"Ah, why must I live? Oh! that I could die—if I could only die!" cries the poor child passionately in her thoughts, stretching out her hands in her young impatience of life, and suffering. "I love him—is it wrong? How can I help it? I loved him before I knew what it meant, I never knew till——"

She stopped suddenly, with a blush that seemed to set her cheeks all a-flame—she had never known till half an hour ago, when she had looked up and met his eyes for that one moment. Ah! why had he looked at her so? And she—oh, merciful heavens! had she betrayed herself? At the very thought Madelon started as if she had been stung. She turned from the window, she covered her face with her hands, and escaping swiftly, she fled to her own room, and throwing herself on the bed,

buried her face in the pillow, to wrestle through her poor little tragedy of love, and self-consciousness, and despair.

And while Madelon is crying her heart out upstairs, this is what has been going on below. There had been an uncomfortable pause in the sitting-room after her swift retreat; Mrs. Vavasour neither moved nor spoke, Maria knitted diligently, and Graham stood gloomily staring down on the music-stool where Madelon had sat and sung, and looked up at him with that sudden gleam in her eyes, till, rousing himself, he walked through the open window, into the garden, across the lawn, to the shrubbery. He stood leaning over the little gate at the end of the path, looking over the broad moonlit field, where the scattered bushes cast strange fantastic shadows, and for the first time he admitted to himself that he had made a great, a terrible mistake in life, and he

hated himself for the admission. What indeed were faith, and loyalty, and honour worth, if they could not keep him true to the girl whose love he had won five years ago, and to whom he was a thousand times pledged by every loving promise, every word of affection that had once passed between them? And yet, was this Maria to whom he had come back, this Maria so cold and indifferent, so alien from him in tastes, ideas, sympathies, was she indeed the very woman who had once won his heart, whom he had chosen as his life-long companion? How had it all been? He looked back into the past, to the first days after his return from the Crimea, when, wounded and helpless, worn out with toil and fever, he had come back to be tended by English-women in an English home. A vision rose before him of a blooming girl with blue ribbons that matched blue eyes, who came

and went about him softly through the long spring and summer days, arranging his cushions, fetching his books, and reading to him by the hour in gentle, unvarying tones. Yes, he understood well enough how it had all come to pass; but those days had gone by, and the Maria who had brightened them, was not she gone also? or rather, had she ever existed except in the eyes that had invested the kind girl-nurse with every perfection? And now what remained? Graham groaned as he bowed his head upon his crossed arms, and suddenly another vision flitted before him—a pale face, a slender form, a pair of brown eyes that seemed to grow out of the twilight, and look at him with a child's affection, a woman's passion—Graham was no boy, to be tossed about on the tempestuous waves of a first love; he had long held that there were things in life, to which love and courtship, marrying and

giving in marriage, might be looked upon as quite subordinate—and yet he felt, at that moment, as if life itself would be a cheap exchange for one touch of the small hand that had clung so confidingly to his, years ago, for one more look into the eyes that had met his, scarcely ten minutes since.

Such a mood could not long endure in a man of Graham's stamp and habit of mind; and in a moment he had roused himself, and begun to walk slowly back towards the house. What he might feel could have no practical bearing on the matter one way or another, and feeling might therefore as well be put out of sight. He was bound to Maria by every tie of honour, and he was no man to break those ties—if she were disposed to hold by them. But was she indeed? Graham had not been blind to what had been going on round him during the last few weeks, and he felt that some

explanation with Maria was due. Well, there should be an explanation, and if he found that she was still willing to hold to their engagement—why, then they would be married.

He went up to Maria, sitting at the window.

"It *is* very warm indoors," he said; "suppose you come and take a turn in the garden."

"As you like," she answered; "I don't find it particularly warm," but she laid down her work at once, and joined him in the garden.

They took two or three turns up and down the lawn in silence, till at last, Graham, trying to speak cheerfully, said, "I had a letter this morning, Maria, that I want to consult you about, as it concerns you as well as me."

"Does it?" she said indifferently. "Well?"

"There is an opening for a physician at that winter place for invalids on the Mediterranean," said Graham, explaining, "and I have the offer of it; it would suit me very well, for the next year or two at any rate, and would enable us to marry at once, but my doubt, Maria, is, whether you would not object to leaving England."

"I don't see what that has to do with it," answered Maria shortly and coldly. "Of course you will do what you think best."

"What I might think best in the abstract, Maria, is not the point; what I want to ascertain, are your wishes in the matter."

"I should have thought you might have known already," she replied; "you are very well aware that, for years, it has been my wish that you should have this partnership with Dr. Vavasour."

"I am aware of it," he said, and paused.

"Listen to me, Maria," he continued in a moment, "let me put the case fairly before you. If I accept Dr. Vavasour's offer, it closes, so to speak, my career. I shall be bound down to this country practice for life probably, for years at any rate, since, after making the arrangement, I could not feel justified in altering it again during Dr. Vavasour's lifetime. If, on the other hand, I go to L——, I shall be bound to no one, and free to take anything else that might suit me better."

"Go, then!" cried Maria, hastily, "I will not stand in your way. I should have thought, Horace, that after all these years, you would have been glad to look forward to a quiet home and a settled life, but I see it is different, so go to L——, and never mind me. If it becomes a question between me and your career, I should think your choice would not be a difficult one."

Her voice began to tremble, but she went on vehemently: "Why do you ask my opinion at all? It can make no difference to you; you have gone your own way these five years past without much regard for my wishes, one way or another, and since your return home, you have hardly spoken to me, much less consulted me——"

It was at that moment that Madelon, kneeling at Madge's bedside, began to sing, and at the sound of her voice ringing through the open window of the little upper room, Graham involuntarily stopped, and lost the thread of Maria's speech. She perceived it at once.

"Ah! yes, that is it," she cried passionately, hardly knowing what she said. "Do you think I do not see, that I cannot understand? Do I not know who it is you care to listen to now, to talk to, to consult? Ask

her what she thinks, ask Madeleine's advice——"

"Be silent!" cried Horace with sudden anger, "I will not have Madeleine's name mentioned between us in that way. Forgive me, Maria," he went on, more calmly, "but this sort of talk is useless; though, if I cared to recriminate, I might perhaps ask you, how it happens that Mr. Morris comes here so frequently."

"Mr. Morris!" faltered Maria, "who told you——"

Her momentary indignation melted into tears and sobs; she turned, and put out her hand to Graham, as they stood together under the big plane tree.

"Oh, Horace," she said, "I am very unhappy, and if you blame me, I cannot help it—I daresay I deserve it."

"My poor Molly," he answered, taking her hand in his. "Why should I blame

you? and why are you unhappy? Let me help you—unless, indeed, I am altogether the cause of it all."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Vavasour, left all alone in the sitting-room, stitched away in the lamplight, looking out from time to time into the dewy garden, where the two figures were pacing up and down. The murmur of their voices reached her, and presently she also heard Madelon singing up above, and then the two went away out of hearing, and she could distinguish nothing in the silence, but the rustling of her own work, and the soft inarticulate sounds of the early night. She could guess pretty well what the result of that talk would be. That very afternoon, going into Maria's room on her return home, she had found the girl in an agony of weeping, and had learnt from her that Mr. Morris had just made her an offer, and that she had been obliged to tell him that she was

already engaged—and oh! what could Mr. Morris think of her, and what would Horace think? cried poor Maria, filled with remorse. And Mr. Morris cared for her so much; he had been so miserable when she had told him they must part, and said she was the only woman he had seen that he could care for; and that was the only reproach he had uttered, though she had treated him so badly. And Horace did not care for her one bit now—she could see it, she knew it, he was tired of her, and she was not clever enough for him, and would never make him a good wife. All this our little-reticent Maria had sobbed out in answer to Mrs. Vavasour's sympathising questions, with many entreaties to know what she had better do next. Mrs. Vavasour could only advise her to say to Horace just what she had said to her, and she had sufficient confidence in Maria's courage and good sense to trust that

she would do so now, when matters had evidently come to a crisis. But it was with the keenest interest she awaited the end of their conversation.

She had not to wait very long. In a few minutes she saw Maria coming quickly across the lawn; she passed through the window and the room without looking up or speaking, and, with a little sob, disappeared. Graham followed more slowly, and sitting down by the table, moodily watched his sister's fingers moving rapidly to and fro.

"That is all over," he said at last.

"What is all over?" inquired Mrs. Vavasour.

"Everything between Maria and me. We have agreed upon one thing at last, at any rate."

"I am sure it is for the best, Horace," said Mrs. Vavasour, looking at him with her kind, gentle eyes.

"I don't see how anything should be for the best when one has behaved like a brute, and knows it," he answered, getting up, and beginning to walk up and down the room.

"Is it you who have been behaving like a brute, Horace? I cannot fancy that."

"I don't know why not," he answered gloomily; then, pausing in his walk, "No one knew of our engagement except ourselves and Aunt Barbara?" he asked.

"No one else was told."

"Well then, no great harm is done, so far as gossip goes. You had better write to Aunt Barbara. I shall go abroad at once."

"To this town on the Mediterranean?"

"Yes, I shall write to-night to B——; and I will start by the seven o'clock train to-morrow morning for London. No one need get up; I will tell Jane to let me have some breakfast."

"We shall hear from you?"

"Yes, I will write when I am across the water. Good-bye."

He stooped down and kissed her as he spoke. She laid her hand on his arm, and detained him for a moment.

"Horace," she said, "you must not vex yourself too much about this; you and Maria have only discovered in time, what numbers of people discover when it is too late—that you are not suited to each other. Believe me, it is far better to find it out before marriage than after."

"I daresay you are right," he said. "Don't be afraid, Georgie, I shall not vex myself too much, but at present the whole thing appears hateful to me, as far as I am concerned."

The next morning he was gone before any one of the family was stirring.

CHAPTER V.

ER, DER HERRLICHSTE VON ALLEN.

"Ashurst, July, 186—.

"DEAR UNCLE HORACE,—Mamma has a bad headache, and says I am to write and ask you whether you have quite forgotten us, and if you are never coming to see us again. She says, cannot you come next week, because Lady Lorrimer's great ball is on the 31st. She and Cousin Madelon are going, and she would be very glad if you could escort them, as papa says he will not go. Cousin Madelon is here still, and Aunt Barbara is coming on Monday to stay

with us for a little while, before she goes back with her to Cornwall. Cousin Madelon has been reading French with me, and giving me music lesons. We had a pic-nic in the woods last week, and my holidays begin to-morrow. I wish you would come back, Uncle Horace, and then we could have some fun before Cousin Madelon goes away. I wish she would never go, but stay here always, as Maria used. I have been reading some of your book; mamma said I might, and I like it very much. Mamma sends her love, and I am

"Your affectionate niece,

"MADGE VAVASOUR."

"Mamma says that she received yesterday, the note that I enclose, and that she sends it to you to read."

The note was from Maria Leslie, and was

dated from a country-town whither she had gone to stay with some friends, shortly after Graham's departure from Ashurst.

"DEAREST GEORGIE,

"I feel that you are the first person to whom I should write the news that I am engaged to be married to Mr. Morris. He has just had the offer of a living in the north, and lost no time in coming to tell me of his prospects, and to invite me to share them. To you, who know him so well, I need say nothing of my own great happiness. I only fear that, after all that has passed, you may think I have been a little precipitate; but I could not but feel that something was due to Mr. Morris, and that it would be wrong to keep him in suspense. Send me your good wishes and congratulations, dear Georgie, for I

cannot feel that my happiness is complete without them.

"Ever your affectionate,

"MARIA LESLIE."

Graham arrived by the last available train on the evening of the 31st, and was told by Madge, who came running into the hall to meet him, that Mamma and Cousin Madelon were dressing, and would Uncle Horace have some dinner, or go and dress too? Uncle Horace said he had dined already, and would dress at once, and so disappeared upstairs with his portmanteau.

When he came down to the drawing-room, he found Mrs. Treherne sitting alone in the summer twilight at the open window.

"Is that you, Horace?" she said, putting out her hand; "you are quite a stranger here, I understand. Georgie says she has

been jealous of my seeing so much of you in London."

"I think Georgie has no right to complain of me," he answered; "if there is a thing on earth I hate, it's a ball—are you going, too, Aunt Barbara?"

"Indeed, no—I think you will have enough to do with two ladies; here comes one of them."

A tall, slender figure, moving through the dusk with her soft trailing draperies, and water-lilies in her brown hair. Graham had not seen her since that evening, more than three months ago, when she had looked up at him, and escaped in the midst of her unfinished song. They took each other's hands in silence now; a sudden consciousness and embarrassment seemed to oppress them both, and make the utterance of a word impossible.

Madelon was the first to speak; she went up to Mrs. Treherne.

"Can you see my flowers, Aunt Barbara?" she said; "are they not pretty? Madge walked three miles to-day to the sedge ponds, on purpose to get them for me."

"Is Madge still your devoted friend?" Horace asked.

"Oh! yes, Madge and I are always great friends. I must not expect all her attentions, though, now that you are come back, Monsieur Horace."

The old childish name seemed to break the spell, and bring back the old familiarity.

"And so you are going to a ball at last, Madelon," Graham said. "For the first time in my life I am sorry I cannot dance, for I shall be deprived of the pleasure of having you for a partner."

"Thank you," she said, "I should have liked to have danced with you very much; but after all, it is in the intention that is the greatest compliment, so I will not mind too much. I think I will be very happy even if I do not dance at all."

She looked up at him for the first time, and even in the dusk he seemed to see the light in her eyes, the smile on her lips, the colour flushing in her cheeks. It was not of the ball she was thinking—it was of him; she had felt the grasp of his kind hand, his voice was sounding in her ears, he had come back at last—at last!

"You have been away a long time, Monsieur Horace," she said softly, "but we have heard of you often; we have read your book, and the critiques upon it; it has been a great success, has it not? And then we have seen your name in the papers—at dinners, at scientific meetings——"

"Yes," said Graham, "I have been doing plenty of hard work lately; but I have come down into the country to be idle, and have some fun, as Madge would say. We will take our holidays together, will we not, Madge?" he added, as the child, followed by her mother, came into the room.

Lady Lorrimer's ball was the culminating point of a series of festivities given in honour of the coming of age of an eldest son. To ordinary eyes, I suppose, it was very like any other ball, to insure whose success no accessory is wanting that wealth and good taste can supply; but to our Madelon there was something almost bewildering in this scene at once so familiar, and so strange, in these big, lighted, crowded rooms, in this music, whose every beat seemed to rouse a thousand memories and associations, linking the present with the so remote past. As for Madelon herself, she

made a success, ideal almost, as if she had indeed been the enchanted Princess of little Madge's fairy-tale. Something rare in the style of her beauty—something in her foreign air and appearance, distinguished her at once in the crowd of girls; she was sought after from the moment she entered the room, and the biggest personages present begged for an introduction to Miss Linders. The girl was not insensible to her triumphs; her cheeks flushed, her eyes brightened with excitement and pleasure. Once, in a pause of the waltz, she was standing with her partner, close to where Graham was leaning against a wall. He had an air of being horribly bored, as indeed he was; but Madelon's eye caught his, and he was obliged to smile in answer to her look of radiant pleasure.

"You are enjoying yourself, I see, Madelon," he said.

"I never was so happy!" she cried. "Ah! if you knew how I love dancing!—and it is so many years since I have had a waltz!"

Later on in the evening, Lady Lorrimer, the fashionable, gay, kind-hearted hostess, came up to her.

"Miss Linders," she said, "I have a favour to ask of you. My aunt, Lady Adelaide Spencer, is passionately fond of music, and Mrs. Vavasour has been telling us how beautifully you sing. Would it be too much to ask you for one song? It is not fair, I know, in the midst of a ball, but the next dance is only a quadrille, I see——"

"I shall be most happy," says Madelon, blushing up, and following Lady Lorrimer down a long corridor into a music-room. There were not above a dozen people present when she began to sing, but the room was quite full before she rose from the

piano. She sang one song after another, as it was asked for—French, German, English. The excitement of the moment, the sense of triumph and success, seemed to fill her with a sort of exaltation; never had her voice been so true and powerful, her accent so pure, her expression so grand and pathetic; she sang as if inspired by the very genius of song.

"We must not be unconscionable, and deprive Miss Linders of all her dancing," said Lady Lorrimer at last—"you would like to go back to the ball-room now, would you not? But first let me introduce you to my aunt; she will thank you better than I can for your singing."

Lady Adelaide Spencer, the great lady of the neighbourhood, a short, stout, good-natured old woman in black velvet, and a grizzled front, gave Madelon a most flattering reception.

"Sit down and talk to me a little," she said. "I want to thank you again for your lovely voice and singing. It is not every young lady who would give up her dancing just for an old woman's caprice."

"Indeed I like singing as much as dancing," says Madelon.

"And you do both equally well, my dear; you may believe me when I tell you so, for I know what good dancing is, and I have been watching you all the evening. You must come and see me and sing to me again. You live with your aunt, Mrs. Treherne, Mrs. Vavasour tells me."

"Yes," replied Madelon.

"I knew Mrs. Treherne well years ago; tell her from me when you go home, that an old woman has fallen in love with her pretty niece, and ask her to bring you to

see me. She is staying at Ashurst, I believe?"

"Yes," said Madelon, "we are both at Dr. Vavasour's house. I have been there all the spring and summer, and Aunt Barbara has come for a few weeks before we go home to Cornwall."

"Do you live always in Cornwall?" asked Lady Adelaide. "Have you never been abroad? Your French and German in singing were quite perfect, but you seem to me to speak English with a foreign accent, and a very pretty one too."

"I was born abroad," answered Madelon—"I spent all the first part of my life on the Continent. I have been in England only five years."

"Ah, that accounts for it all, then. What part of the Continent do you come from?"

"I was born in Paris," says unthinking

Madelon, "but we—I travelled about a great deal; one winter I was in Florence, and another in Nice, but I know Germany and Belgium best. I was often at Wiesbaden, and Homburg, and Spa."

"Very pretty places, all of them," said Lady Adelaide, "but so shockingly wicked! It is dreadful to think of the company one meets there. Did you ever see the gambling-tables, my dear? But I daresay not; you would of course be too young to be taken into such places."

"Yes, I have seen them," said Madelon, suddenly scarlet.

"My health obliges me to go to these baths from time to time," continued the old lady; "but the thought of what goes on in those Kursaals quite takes away any pleasure I might otherwise have; and the people who frequent the tables—the women and the men who go there night after night! I

assure you my blood has run cold sometimes when one of those notorious gamblers has been pointed out to me, and I think of the young lives he may have ruined, the young souls he may have tempted to destruction. I myself have known some sad cases—I am sure you sympathise with me, Miss Linders?"

"Lady Adelaide," said a portly gentleman, coming up, "will you allow me to take you into supper?"

"You will not forget to come and see me, my dear," cried Lady Adelaide, with a parting wave of her fan as she moved away, leaving the girl sitting there, silent and motionless. People brushed by her as they left the room, but she paid no heed. Mrs. Vavasour spoke to her as she passed on her way to supper, but Madelon did not answer. All at once she sprang up, looking round as if longing to escape; as she did so, her eyes

met Graham's; he was standing close to her, behind her chair, and something in his expression, something of sympathy, of compassion perhaps, made her cheeks flame, and her eyes fill with sudden tears of resentment and humiliation. He had heard them, he had heard every word that had been said, and he was pitying her! What right had he, what did she want with his compassion? She met his glance with one of defiance, and then turned her back upon him; she must remain where she was, she could not go out of the room alone, but, at any rate, he should not have the opportunity of letting her see that he pitied her.

Horace, however, who had in fact heard every word of the conversation, and perhaps understood Madelon's looks well enough, came up to her, as she stood alone, watching the people stream by her out of the room.

"There is supper going on somewhere," he said, "will you come and have some, or shall I bring you an ice here?"

"Neither," she answered, quickly. "I—I don't want anything, and I would rather stay here."

"Perhaps you are right," he said. "We shall have the room to ourselves in a minute, and then it will be cooler."

In fact the room was nearly deserted—almost everyone had gone away to supper. Madelon stood leaning against the window, half hidden by the curtain; the sudden gleam of defiance, of resentment against Horace, had faded; it had vanished at the sound of his kind voice, which she loved better than any other in the world. But there were tears of passion still in her eyes; her little moment of joyousness and triumph had been so cruelly dashed from her; she felt hurt, humiliated, almost exasperated.

"How hot it is!" she said, glancing round impatiently. "Where is everyone gone? Cannot we go too? No, not in to supper. What is going on in that little room? I have not been in there."

"It leads into the garden, I think," answered Graham. "Shall we see? Wait a moment. I will fetch you a shawl, and then, if you like, we can go out."

He strode off quickly. There was vexation and perplexity in his kind heart too. He understood well enough how the girl had been wounded—his little Madelon, for whom it would have seemed a small thing to give his right hand, could such a sacrifice have availed her aught. And he could do nothing. His compassion insulted her, his interference she would have resented; no, he could do nothing to protect his little girl. So he thought as he made his way into the cloak-room to extract a shawl. He was

going his way in the world, and she hers, and she might be suffering, lonely, unprotected, for aught that he could do, unless—unless——

"Those cloaks belong to Lady Adelaide's party," cried the maid, as Graham recklessly seized hold of one in a bundle. "You must not take those, sir, Lady Adelaide will be going immediately."

"Confound the cloaks, and Lady Adelaide too!" cried Graham, impatiently. "Here, give me something—anything. Where is Miss Linders' shawl? Which are Mrs. Vavasour's things?"

Madelon had stood still for a moment after Horace had left her, and then, as he did not immediately return, she left her station behind the window-curtain, and began walking up and down the room. "How tired I am," she thought wearily. "Will this evening never end? Oh! I wish I had never come.

I wish I were going away somewhere, anywhere, so that I should never see or hear again of anybody, that knows anything about me. Why cannot we go home? It must be very late. I wonder what time it is? Perhaps there is a clock in here."

The door of the room which Graham had said led into the garden, stood ajar; she pushed it open, and went in. It was a small room, with a glass door at the further end, and on this evening had been arranged for cards, so that Madelon, on entering, suddenly found herself in the midst of green-baize-covered tables, lighted candles, packs of cards, and a dozen or so of silent, absorbed gentlemen, intent upon the trumps and honours, points and odd tricks. The girl, already excited, and morbidly susceptible, stopped short at this spectacle, as one struck with a sudden blow. Not for years, not since that evening the memory of which

ever came upon her with a sudden sting, when she had met Monsieur Horace at the gambling-tables of Spa, had Madelon seen a card; Mrs. Treherne never had them in her house; in those little parties of which mention has been made as her only dissipation, they had formed no part of the entertainment, and the sight of them now roused a thousand tumultuous emotions of pain and pleasure. A thousand associations attached themselves to those little bits of pasteboard, whose black and red figures seemed to dance before her eyes—recollections of those early years with their for-ever-gone happiness, of her father, of happy evenings that she, an innocent, unconscious child, had passed at his side, building houses with old packs of cards, or spinning the little gold pieces that passed backwards and forwards so freely. She was happy then, happier than she could ever be again, she thought desparingly,

now that she had been taught so sore a knowledge of good and evil. The last evening of her father's life came suddenly before her; she seemed to hear again his last words to herself, to see the scene with Legros, the cards tumbling in a heap on the floor, his dying face. A kind of terror seized her, and she stood gazing as though fascinated at the dozen respectable gentlemen dealing their cards and marking their games, till Graham's step and voice aroused her.

"Here is your shawl, Madelon," he said, putting it round her shoulders; "did you think I was never coming? That woman——"

He stopped short in his speech; she turned round and looked at him with her white, scared face, her wide-open brown eyes, as if she had seen a ghost. Ghosts enough indeed, our poor Madelon had seen during

these last five minutes; but they were not visible to Graham, who stood sufficiently astonished and alarmed, as she turned abruptly away again, and disappeared through the glass door into the garden.

"Stay, Madelon!" he cried and followed her out into the night.

It was raining, he found, as soon as he got outside. The garden had been prettily illuminated with coloured lamps hung along the verandah, and amongst the trees and shrubs, but they were nearly all extinguished now. It was a black mournful night, summer-time though it was, the wind moaning and sighing, the rain falling steadily. Graham, as he passed quickly along the sodden path, had a curious sensation of having been through all this before; another sad, rainy night came to his mind, a lighted street, a dark avenue, and a little passionate figure flying before him, instead of the tall,

white one who moved swiftly on now, and finally disappeared beneath the long shoots of climbing plants that overhung a sort of summer-house at the end of a walk. The lamps were not all extinguished here; the wet leaves glistened as the wind swept the branches to and fro, and Horace, as he entered, could see Madelon sitting by the little table, trembling and shivering, her hair all blown about and shining in the uncertain light. What had suddenly come over her? Graham was fairly perplexed.

"Madelon," he said, going up to her, "what is the matter? has anything happened, or anyone vexed you?"

"*Non, non,*" she cried, jumping up impatiently, and speaking in French as she sometimes did when excited, "*je n'ai rien—rien du tout*; leave me, Monsieur, I beg of you! How you weary me with your ques-

tions! I was rather hot, and came here for a little fresh air—that was all."

"You are cooler now," said Graham, as she stood drawing her shawl round her, her teeth chattering.

"Yes," she said, with a little shiver, "it is rather cold here, and damp; it is raining, is it not? Let us go back and dance; I adore dancing; it was papa who first taught it to me, do you know, Monsieur Horace? He taught me a great many things."

"You had better not dance any more," said Graham, taking her little burning hand in his. "You are overheated already, and will catch cold."

She snatched away her hand impatiently.

"Ah, do not touch me!" she cried. "Let us go, why do we stay here? I do not want your prescriptions, Monsieur Horace; I *will* go and dance."

"Wait a minute," said Graham, "let me wrap your shawl closer round you, or you will be wet through; it is pouring with rain."

The friendly voice and action went to her heart, and seemed to reproach her for her harsh, careless words. They walked back in silence to the house, but when they reached the empty music-room again, she put both hands on his arm with an imploring gesture, as if to detain him.

"Don't go, don't leave me," she said, "I am very wicked, Monsieur Horace, but—"

And then she dropped down on to a seat in the deep recess formed by the window.

The sight of her unhappiness touched Graham's heart with a sharper pang than anything else had power to do. He loved her so, this poor child, he would have warded off all unhappiness, all trouble from

her life; and there she sat miserable before him, and it seemed to him he could not raise a finger to help her.

"You are not happy, Madelon," he said at length. "Can I do nothing to help you?"

She raised her head and looked at him.

"Nothing, nothing!" she cried. "Ah, forgive me, Monsieur Horace, for speaking so to you; but you do not know, you cannot understand how unhappy I am."

"But why, Madelon? What is it? Has anyone spoken unkindly to you?"

"No, no, it is not that—you do not understand. Why do you come to me here? Why am I here at all? If people knew who, and what I am, would they talk to me as they do? Supposing I had told Lady Adelaide just now—yes, you heard every word of that conversation—she would have despised me, as you pitied me, Mon-

sieur Horace—yes, you pitied me, I saw it in your eyes."

"My pity is not such as you need resent, Madelon," said Graham, with a sigh.

"I do not resent it," she answered hastily; "you are kind, you are good; you do well to pity me. What am I? The daughter of a—a—yes, I know well enough now—I did not once—but I do now, and I am here, in your society—amongst you all—on sufferance."

"You are wrong," answered Graham quickly, scarcely thinking of what he said. "In the first place, it can make no difference to anyone that knows you, who your father was; and then you are here as Mrs. Treherne's niece——"

"I am my father's daughter!" cried Madelon, blazing up, "and I must not own it. Yes, yes! I understand it all; as Mrs. Treherne's niece I may be received—but not as

—— Oh! papa, papa!" her voice suddenly breaking down; "why did you die? why did you leave me all alone?"

Graham stood silent; he felt so keenly for her; he had so dreaded for her the time when this knowledge of her father's true character must come home to her. In his wide sympathy with everything connected with her, he had regrets for that poor father, also, dead years ago, who in his last hours had so plainly foreseen some such moment as this—and yet not quite, either.

"Monsieur Horace," Madelon went on wildly, "I did so love papa, and he loved me—ah! you cannot imagine how much. When I think of it now, when I see other fathers with their children, how little they seem to care for them in comparison, I wonder at his love for me. He nursed me, he played with me, he took such care of

me, he made me so happy. I think sometimes if I could only hear his voice once more, and see him smiling at me, as he used to smile—and I must not speak of him, I must not even mention him. It is unjust, it is cruel. I do not want to live with people who will not let me think of my father."

"You may speak of him to me, Madelon——"

"To you?" she said, interrupting him—"ah! you knew him, you know how he loved me; but Aunt Barbara—she will not even let me mention his name."

"Then she is very wrong and very foolish," Graham answered hastily. "Listen to me, Madelon. You are making yourself miserable for nothing. To begin with, if everybody in the room to-night knew who your father was, and all about him, I don't suppose it would make the least difference; and as for the rest, you have no occasion to

concern or distress yourself about anything in your father's life, except what relates to yourself. Whatever he may have been to others, he was the kindest and most loving of fathers to you, and that is all you need think about."

"But Aunt Barbara——"

"Never mind Aunt Barbara. If she chooses to do what you and I think foolish, we will not follow her example. You may talk to me, Madelon, as much as ever you please. I should like to hear about your father, for I know how often you think of him. Now, will you go back to the ball-room? I give you leave to dance now," he added, smiling.

She did not move nor answer, but she looked up at him with a sudden change in her face, and he saw that she was trembling.

"What is it now, Madelon?" he said.

"You are so good," she said. "When I

am unhappy, you always comfort me—it has always, always been so——"

"Do I comfort you?" said Graham—"why, that is good news, Madelon."

"Ah! yes," she cried, in her impulsive way, "you have always been good to me—how can I forget it? That night when papa died, and I was so unhappy all alone—and since then, how often—"

Graham turned away, and walked twice up and down the room. There was a distant sound of music, and footsteps, and voices, but people had drifted away into the ball-room again, and they were alone. He came back to where Madelon was sitting.

"If you think so, indeed, Madelon," he said, "will you not let it be so always? Do you think you can trust me enough to let me always take care of you? I can ask for nothing dearer in life."

"What do you mean?" she cried, glancing up at him startled.

"Do you not understand?" he said, looking at her, and taking one of her little hands in his—"do you not understand that one may have a secret hidden away for years, and never suspected even by oneself, perhaps, till all at once one discovers it? I think I must have had some such secret, Madelon, and that I never guessed at it till a few months since, when I found a little girl that I knew years ago, grown up into somebody that I love better than all the world——"

"Ah! stop!" she cried, jumping up, and pulling her hand away. "You are good and kind, but it is not possible that you—ah! Monsieur Horace, I am not worthy!"

"Not worthy! Good heavens, Madelon, you not worthy!" He paused for a moment. "What is not possible?" he went on. "Per-

haps I am asking too much. I am but a battered old fellow in these days, I know, and if, indeed, you cannot care enough for me——"

He held out his hand again with a very kind smile. She looked up at him.

"Monsieur Horace," she said, "I—I do—"

And then she put both her hands into his with her old, childish gesture, and I daresay the little weary spirit thought it had found its rest at last.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. TREHERNE'S FORGIVENESS.

MRS. TREHERNE was sitting in the drawing-room of her London house. The window was open to the hot dusty street, long shadows lay upon the deserted pavement, the opposite houses were all closed, and no sound disturbed the stillness of the September evening but the shouts of the children, as they played up and down the steps, and under the porticoes of the houses, and the bells of the Westminster clocks chiming one quarter after another. Through the half-drawn curtains that hung between

the two drawing-rooms she could see Graham and Madelon sitting together, looking out upon the park, as they talked in low tones, and a sudden sadness filled her heart. They were to be married next week, and go abroad at once, whilst she returned to Cornwall; and the even current of a lonely life, that had been stirred and altered in its course five years ago, would return to its original channel, to be disturbed, perhaps, no more.

It was of these five years that Mrs. Treherne was thinking now, and of others, perhaps, beyond them again, when she too had been young, and beloved, and happy. There are some lives which, in their even tenour of mild happiness, seem to glide smoothly from one scattered sorrow to another, so that to the very end some of the hopefulness and buoyancy of youth are retained; but there are others in which are concentrated in one

brief space those keen joys and keener sorrows that no one quite survives, which, in passing over us take from us our strongest vitality, our young capacity for happiness and suffering alike. Such a life had been Mrs. Treherne's. She had been a woman of deep affections and passions, and they all lay buried in those early years that had taken from her husband, and children, and friend, and it was only a dim shadow of her former self that moved, and spoke, and lived in these latter days.

It was an old story with her now, however. She did not envy these two happy people who were talking together in the next room. It was of Madelon she was thinking most, thinking sadly enough that in all these years she had not been able to win the girl's heart. When she had first seen the child of the friend who in all the world had been most dear to her, she had promised herself

that, for Magdalen's sake, she would take her home and bring her up as her own daughter; and she had kept her promise, but she had failed in making her happy. She knew it now, when she contrasted the Madelon of to-day, going about with the light in her eyes, and the glad ring in her voice, with the Madelon of six months ago. She had not been able to make her happy, and she would leave her without a regret; and the thought gave Mrs. Treherne a sharper pang than she had felt for many a day.

And meanwhile this was what Madelon was saying—

"In another month, Madelon," Graham had said to her, "we shall be at L——, and you will be looking out on the blue skies that you have so often longed for."

"Yes," she replied, "and then perhaps I shall be thinking of the grey ones I have

left behind; I shall be sorry to leave England, after all. I will pay your country so much of a compliment as that, Monsieur Horace, or rather I shall be sorry to leave some of the English people—Aunt Barbara, I do not like to think of her all alone; she will miss me, she says."

"I should not wonder if she did, Madelon."

"I do not know why she should; I think I have been ungrateful to her; she has been so good, so kind to me, why have I not been able to love her more? Where should I have been if she had not taken care of me? and such care! If I lived to be a hundred I could never repay all she has done, and now I am going away to be happy, and she will be lonely and sad."

"We will ask her to come and see us, some day, at L——. I saw a house when I was there, that would suit us exactly, and it

has a room, which shall be sometimes for Aunt Barbara, sometimes for Madge. It has an open gallery, and an outside staircase leading down to the garden, which will delight Madge's small mind."

"Like my room at Le Trooz," cried Madelon. "Ah! how glad I am that you can go there first, and that I shall see Jeanne-Marie again; if only we do not find her ill—it is so long since I have heard from her, and she used to write so regularly."

"For my part," said Graham, "I wish to see the hotel at Chaudfontaine, where I first met a small person who was very rude to me, I remember."

"And your wish will not be gratified, sir, for the season will be over by next month, and the hotel closed for the winter. I am sorry for that, but I wonder you can wish to see a place where anyone was rude to you—now with me of course it is different."

"In what way, Madelon?"

"Ah! that I will not tell you—but we will go to the convent at Liége, Monsieur Horace; I would like to see Sœur Lucie again. Poor Sœur Lucie—but it is sad to think that she is always there making her confitures—there are so many other things to be done in the world."

"For example?"

"Joining a marching regiment," she said, looking at him half-laughing, half-shyly. "Monsieur Horace, where will you go when you are tired of L——? You will be tired of it some day, I know, and so shall I. Where will you go next?"

"I don't know," he answered; "you see, Madelon, in taking a wife, I undertake a certain responsibility; I can't go marching about the world as if I were a single man."

"You don't mean that!" she cried, "if I

thought you meant that, I—I—ah, why do you tease me?" she added, as Graham could not help laughing, "you know you promised me I should go with you everywhere. I am very strong, I love travelling, I want to see the world. Where will you go? To America again? I will adopt the customs and manners of any country; I will dress in furs with a seal-skin cap, and eat blubber like an Esquimaux, or turn myself into an Indian squaw; would you like to have me for a squaw, Monsieur Horace? I would learn all their duties; I believe they carry their husband's game, and never speak till they are spoken to. My ideas are very vague. But I would learn—ah, yes, I could learn anything."

Mrs. Treherne was still sitting, thinking her sad thoughts, when she felt an arm passed round her neck, and turning round, saw Madelon kneeling at her side. "Ho-

race has gone out," she said; "we have been talking over our plans, Aunt Barbara; we have settled quite now that we will first go to Liége and Le Trooz, and see Jeanne-Marie, and then on to the south. It is good of Monsieur Horace to go to Liége, for it is all to please me, and it is quite out of his way."

"And you go on to L—— afterwards? You will be glad to find yourself abroad again, Madeleine."

"Yes," she said, hesitating; "but I shall be sorry to leave you, Aunt Barbara."

"Will you, my dear? I am afraid, Madeleine, that I have not made you very happy, though I have only found it out in these last few weeks."

"Aunt Barbara, how can you say such a thing?" cried Madelon. "What have you not done for me? Why, I could never, never thank you for it all; it is for that—because it is so much—that I cannot say

more. One cannot use the same words that one does for ordinary things."

"I know, my dear," said Mrs. Treherne, smoothing the girl's hair, "but nevertheless I have not made you happy, and I now know the reason why. Yes, I have been talking to Horace, and I understand your feeling; and if it were all to come again, perhaps I might act differently; but it is too late now, and it matters little, since you are happy at last."

"Aunt Barbara, I have been happy——"

"You see, Madeleine, your mother was my very dearest friend; all your love has been for your father, and that is only natural; but some day, perhaps, you will understand what a mother might have been to you, and then, my dear, you will care for me also a little, knowing how dearly I loved yours."

"I know," said Madelon, "and I do love

you, Aunt Barbara, but I must always care for papa most of all."

"I know, my dear; it is only natural, and from what Horace tells me, he must have deserved your love." And with those words, Mrs. Treherne in some sort forgave the man who had been the one hatred of her life, and won the heart of the girl beside her.

"Aunt Barbara," she cried again, "I do love you." And this time Mrs. Treherne believed her.

CHAPTER VII.

CONCLUSION.

THE hotel at Chaudfontaine was closed for the winter. Every window in the big white building was shuttered, every door barred; the courtyard was empty; not a footstep, nor a voice resounded. Nevertheless, an open carriage from Liége stopped in front of the gate, and two people getting out, proceeded to look through the iron bars of the railing.

"Was I not right?" said Madelon. "I told you, Horace, it would be closed for the winter, and so it is."

"I don't care in the least," he replied.

"If it affords me any gratification, Madelon, to look through the railing into that court-yard, I don't see why I should not have it."

"Oh! by all means," she answered; "but it is just a little tame, is it not?—for a sentimental visit, to be looking through these iron bars."

"That is the very place where I sat," said Graham, not heeding her, "and took you on my knee."

"I don't remember anything about it, Monsieur Horace——"

"Nothing, Madelon?"

"Well, perhaps—you gave me a fish, I remember—it was the fish that won my heart; and I have it still, you see."

"Oh! then, your heart was won?"

"A little," she answered, glancing up at him for a moment; and then, moving on, she said—"See here, Horace, this is the

hawthorn bush under which I slept that morning after I had run away from the convent. How happy I was to have escaped! I remember standing at this gate afterwards eating my bread, and that dreadful woman came out of the hotel."

"Is there no way of getting in?" said Graham, shaking at the gate.

"None, I am afraid," Madelon answered. "Stay, there used to be a path that led round at the back across a little bridge into the garden. Perhaps we might get in that way."

They were again disappointed; they found the path, and the wooden bridge that crossed the stream, but another closed gate prevented their entering the garden.

"This, however, becomes more and more interesting," said Graham, after looking at the spot attentively. "Yes, this is the

very place, Madelon, where I first saw you with a doll in your arms."

"Really?" she said.

"Yes, really; and then some one—your father, I think—called you away."

They were silent for a minute, looking at the trees, the shrubs, the grass growing all rough and tangled in the deserted garden.

"We must go," Graham said at last; "it is getting late, Madelon, and we have to drive back to Liége, remember, after we have seen Jeanne-Marie."

They got into the carriage again, and drove on towards Le Trooz, along the valley under the hills, all red and brown with October woods, beside the river, gleaming between green pastures in the low afternoon sun. They had arrived at Liége the day before, and that morning was to have been devoted to visiting the convent; but the convent was gone. On inquiry, they learnt

that the nuns had removed to another house ten miles distant from Liége, and on the hills where the old farm-house, the white, low-roofed convent had once stood so peacefully, a great iron-foundry was smoking and spouting fire day and night, covering field and garden with heaps of black smouldering ashes.

"How places and things change!" said Madelon, as they drove along; "we have had two disappointments to-day—shall we have a third, I wonder? Supposing Jeanne-Marie should have gone to live in another house? Ah! how glad I shall be to see her again!—and she will be pleased to see me, I know."

As she spoke, the scattered houses, the church, the white cottages of Le Trooz came in sight. Madelon checked the driver as they approached the little restaurant, the first house in the village, and she and

Graham got out of the carriage. The bench still stood before the door, the pigeons were flying about, and the bee-hives were on their stand, but the blue board was gone from the white wall, and the place had a deserted look.

"It is strange," said Madelon. She pushed open the door that stood ajar, and went into the little public room; it was empty; the table shoved away into one corner, the chairs placed against the wall—no signs of the old life and occupation.

"Can Jeanne-Marie have gone away, do you think?" said Madelon, almost piteously. "I am sure she cannot be here."

"I will inquire," said Graham.

He went out into the road, and stopped a little girl of ten or twelve years, who was walking towards the village with a pitcher of water.

"Do you know whether the woman who

lived in this house has left?" he asked. "Jeanne-Marie she was called, I think?"

The child stared up at the strange gentleman with the foreign accent:

"Jeanne-Marie that used to live here?" she said. "She is dead."

"Dead?" cried Madelon. The tears came rushing into her eyes. "Ah! why did I not know? I would have come if I had known. When did she die?"

"More than a month ago," the girl answered; "she died here in this house."

"And who lives here now?" inquired Graham.

"Jacques Monnier—he that works at the factory now. He is out all day; but his wife should be here."

And in fact, at the sound of the voices, the door leading into the kitchen opened, aud a young woman appeared.

"Pardon," said Madelon, going forward;

"we came here to inquire for Jeanne-Marie; but she—she is dead, we hear."

"Yes, she is dead," the woman replied; then, in answer to further questions, told how Jeanne-Marie, when she was taken ill, had refused to let anyone be written to, or sent for; and had died alone at last, with no one near her but a hired nurse. "She left enough money for her burial, and to have a wooden cross put on her grave," said the woman, "and asked M. le Curé to see that all her things were sold, and the money given to the poor."

"Is she buried here?" said Madelon. "Horace, I should like to see her grave."

"Louise, there, can show it to you," says Madame Monnier, pointing to the child; "run home with your water, *ma petite*, and then come back and show Monsieur and Madame the road to the churchyard."

"And I have a favour to beg," said Madelon, turning to the woman again. "I knew Jeanne-Marie well; she was very kind to me at one time. Might I see the room in which she died? It is upstairs, is it not, with the window opening on to the steps leading into the garden?"

The woman consented civilly enough, concealing any astonishment she might feel at this tall, beautiful lady, who had come to inquire after Jeanne-Marie; and Madelon left Graham below, and went up alone to the little bed-room, where she had spent so many hours. It was hardly altered. The bed stood in the old place; the vines clustered round the window. Madelon's heart was full of sorrow; she had loved Jeanne-Marie so much, and more and more, perhaps, as years went on, and she had learnt to understand better all that the woman had done for her—and she had

died alone—she who had saved her life.

When she came down again Louise had reappeared, and was waiting to conduct them to the churchyard. The child went on in front, and they followed her in silence down the village street. It was already evening, the sun had sunk behind the hills; the men were returning from their work; the children were playing and shouting, and the women stood gossiping before their doors. All was life and animation in the little village, where a strange, silent woman had once passed to and fro, with deeds and words of kindness for the suffering and sorrowful, but who would be seen there no more.

"There is the grave," says Louise, pointing it out to them. It was in a corner of the little graveyard; the earth was still fresh over it, and the black cross at its head was one of the newest amongst the hundred similar ones round about. Graham dis-

missed the child with a gratuity, and he and Madelon went up to the grave. There was no name, only the initials J. M. R. painted on the cross beneath the three white tears, and the customary "*priez pour elle!*" Some one had hung up a wreath of immortelles, and a rose-tree, twined round a neighbouring cross, had shed its petals above Jeanne-Marie's head.

Madelon knelt down and began to pull out some weeds that had sprung up, whilst Graham stood looking on. Long afterwards, one might fancy, would that hour still live in his memory—the peaceful stillness brooding over the little graveyard, the sunset sky, the sheltering hills, the scent of the falling roses, and Madelon, in her dark dress, kneeling by the grave. Her task was soon accomplished, but she still knelt on motionless. Who shall say of what she was think-

ing? Something perhaps of the real meaning of life, of its great underlying sadness, ennobled by patient suffering, by unselfish devotion, for presently she turned round to Graham.

"Oh, Horace," she said, "help me to be good; I am not, you know, but I would like to be—and you will help me."

"My little Madelon!" he raised her up, he took her in his arms. "We will both try to be good, with God's help. The world is all before us, to work in, and do our best—we will do what we can; with God's help, I say, we will do what we can."

They drove swiftly back towards Liége; the air blew freshly in their faces, the sunset colours faded, the stars came out one by one. As they vanish from our sight, they seem to fade into the mysterious twilight

land. For them, as for us, other suns will rise, other days will dawn, but we shall have no part in them; between them and us falls the darkness of an eternal separation.

THE END.

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